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WATER WITCH;

OR,

THE SKIMMER OF

THE SEAS.

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THE WATER WITCH.

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CHAPTER I.

"Thou, Julia, thou hast metamorphosed me;
Made me neglect my studies, lose my time,
War with good counsels, set the world at nought."
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Ludlow quitted the Lust in Rust with a wavering purpose. Throughout the whole of the preceding interview, he had jealously watched the eye and features of la Belle Barbérie, and he had not failed to draw his conclusions from a mien that too plainly expressed

a deep interest in the free-trader. For a time only had he been induced, by the calmness and self-possession with which she received her uncle and himself, to believe that she had not visited the Water Witch at all; but when the gay and reckless being who governed the movements of that extraordinary vessel appeared, he could no longer flatter himself with this hope. He now believed that her choice for life had been made; and while he deplored the infatuation which could induce so gifted a woman to forget her station and character, he was himself too frank not to see that the individual who had in so short a time gained this ascendancy over the feelings of Alida, was in many respects fitted to exercise a powerful influence over the imagination of a youthful and secluded female.

There was a struggle in the mind of the young commander, between his duty and his feelings. Remembering the artifice by which he had formerly fallen into the power of the

smugglers, he had taken his precautions so well, in the present visit to the villa, that he firmly believed he had the person of his lawless rival at his mercy. To avail himself of this advantage, or to retire and leave him in possession of his mistress and his liberty, was the point mooted in his thoughts. Though direct and simple in his habits, like most of the seamen of that age, Ludlow had all the loftier sentiments that become a gentleman. He felt keenly for Alida, and he shrunk with sensitive pride from incurring the imputation of having acted under the impulses of disappointment. To these motives of forbearance was also to be added the inherent reluctance which, as an officer of rank, he felt to the degradation of being employed in a duty that more properly belongs to men of less elevated ambition. He looked on himself as a defender of the rights and glory of his sovereign, and not as a mercenary instrument of those who collected her customs; and though he would

not have hesitated to incur any rational hazard in capturing the vessel of the smuggler, or in making captives of all or any of her crew on their proper element, he disliked the appearance of seeking a solitary individual on the land: in addition to this feeling, there was his own pledge, that he met the proscribed dealer in contraband on neutral ground. Still the officer of the Queen had his orders, and he could not shut his eyes to the general obligations of duty. The brigantine was known to inflict so much loss on the revenue of the crown—more particularly in the other hemisphere—that an especial order had been issued by the admiral of the station for her capture. Here then was an opportunity of depriving the vessel of that master-spirit which, notwithstanding the excellence of its construction, had alone so long enabled it to run the gauntlet of a hundred cruisers with impunity. Agitated by these contending feelings and reflections, the young sailor left the door of the villa, and came

upon its little lawn, in order to reflect with less interruption, and indeed to breathe more freely.

The night had advanced into the first watch of the seamen. The shadow of the mountain, however, still covered the grounds of the villa, the river, and the shores of the Atlantic, with a darkness that was deeper than the obscurity which dimmed the surface of the rolling ocean beyond. Objects were so indistinct as to require close and steady looks to ascertain their character, while the setting of the scene might be faintly traced by its hazy and indistinct outlines. The curtains of la Cour des Fées had been drawn, and though the lights were still shining within, the eye could not penetrate the pavilion. Ludlow gazed about him, and then held his way reluctantly towards the water.

In endeavouring to conceal the interior of her apartment from the eyes of those without, Alida had suffered a corner of the drapery to remain open. When Ludlow reached the gate

that led to the landing, he turned to take a last look at the villa, and, favoured by his new position, he caught a glimpse, through the opening, of the person of her who was still uppermost in his thoughts.

La Belle Barbérie was seated at the little table by whose side she had been found earlier in the evening. An elbow rested on the precious wood, and one fair hand supported a brow that was thoughtful far beyond the usual character of its expression, if not melancholy. The commander of the Coquette felt the blood rushing to his heart, for he fancied that the beautiful and pensive countenance was that of a penitent. It is probable that the idea quickened his drooping hopes, for Ludlow believed it might not yet be too late to rescue the woman he so sincerely loved from the precipice over which she was suspended. The seemingly irretrievable step already taken, was forgotten, and the generous young sailor was about to rush back to la Cour des Fées, to

implore its mistress to be just to herself, when the hand fell from her polished brow, and Alida raised her face with a look which denoted that she was no longer alone. The captain drew back to watch the issue.

When Alida lifted her eyes, it was in kindness, and with that frank ingenuousness with which an unperverted female greets the countenance of those who have her confidence. She smiled, though still in sadness rather than in pleasure, and she spoke, but the distance prevented her words from being audible. At the next instant, Seadrift moved into the space visible through the half-drawn drapery, and took her hand. Alida made no effort to withdraw the member, but on the contrary, she looked up into his face with still less equivocal interest, and appeared to listen to his voice with an absorbed attention. The gate was swung violently open, and Ludlow had reached the margin of the river before he again paused.

The barge of the Coquette was found where her commander had ordered his people to lie concealed, and he was about to enter it, when the noise of the little gate, again shutting with the wind, induced him to cast a look behind. A human form was distinctly to be seen against the light walls of the villa, descending towards the river. The men were commanded to keep close, and withdrawing within the shadow of a fence, the captain waited the approach of the new comer.

As the unknown person passed, Ludlow recognised the agile form of the free-trader. The latter advanced to the margin of the river, and gazed warily about him for several minutes. A low but distinct note, on a common ship's call, was then heard. The summons was soon succeeded by the appearance of a small skiff, which glided out of the grass on the opposite side of the stream, and approached the spot where Seadrift awaited its arrival. The free-trader sprang lightly into the little boat, which

immediately began to glide out of the river. As the skiff passed the spot where he stood, Ludlow saw that it was pulled by a single seaman; and as his own boat was manned by six lusty rowers, he felt that the person of the man whom he so much envied, was at length fairly and honourably in his power. We shall not attempt to analyze the emotion that was ascendant in the mind of the young officer. It is enough for our purpose to add, that he was soon in his boat and in full pursuit.

As the course to be taken by the barge was diagonal, rather than direct, a few powerful strokes of the oars brought it so near the skiff, that Ludlow, by placing his hand on the gunwale of the latter, could arrest its progress.

"Though so lightly equipped, fortune favours you less in boats than in larger craft, Master Seadrift," said Ludlow, when, by virtue of a strong arm, he had drawn his prize so near, as to find himself seated within a few feet of his prisoner. "We meet on our proper element,

where there can be no neutrality between one of the contraband and a servant of the Queen."

The start, the half-repressed exclamation, and the momentary silence, showed that the captive had been taken completely by surprise.

"I admit your superior dexterity," he at length said, speaking low, and not without agitation. "I am your prisoner, Captain Ludlow, and I would now wish to know your intentions in disposing of my person?"

"That is soon answered. You must be content to take the homely accommodations of the Coquette for the night, instead of the more luxurious cabin of your Water Witch. What the authorities of the province may decide to-morrow, it exceeds the knowledge of a poor commander in the navy to say."

"The Lord Cornbury has retired to—"

"A gaol," said Ludlow, observing that the other spoke more like one who mused, than like one who asked a question. "The kinsman of our gracious Queen speculates on the chances

of human fortune within the walls of a prison. His successor, the Brigadier Hunter, is thought to have less sympathy for the moral infirmities of human nature!"

"We deal lightly with dignities!" exclaimed the captive, with all his former gaiety of tone and manner. "You have your revenge for some personal liberties that were certainly taken not a fortnight since with this boat and her crew; still, I have much mistaken your character, if unnecessary severity forms one of its features. May I communicate with the brigantine?"

"Freely,—when she is once in the care of a Queen's officer."

"Oh, Sir, you disparage the qualities of my mistress, in supposing there exists a parallel with your own! The Water Witch will go at large till a far different personage shall become your captive.—May I communicate with the shore?"

"To that there exists no objection—if you will point out the means."

"I have one here who will prove a faithful messenger."

"Too faithful to the delusion which governs all your followers! Your man must be your companion in the Coquette, Master Seadrift; though," and Ludlow spoke in melancholy, "if there be any on the land who take so near an interest in your welfare as to find more sorrow in uncertainty than in the truth, one of my own crew, in any of whom confidence may be placed, shall do your errand."

"Let it be so," returned the free-trader, as if satisfied that he could, in reason, expect no more. "Take this ring to the lady of yonder dwelling," he continued, when Ludlow had selected the messenger, "and say that he who sends it, is about to visit the cruiser of Queen Anne in company of her commander. Should there be question of the motive, you can speak to the manner of my arrest."

"And, mark me, fellow," added his captain; "that duty done, look to the idlers on the shore, and see that no boat quits the river to apprize the smugglers of their loss."

The man, who was armed in the fashion of a seaman on boat-duty, received these orders with the customary deference, and the barge having drawn to the shore for that purpose, he landed.

"And now, Master Seadrift, having thus far complied with your wishes, I may expect you will not be deaf to mine. Here is a seat at your service in my barge, and I confess it will please me to see it occupied."

As the captain spoke, he reached forth an arm, partly in natural complaisance, and partly with a carelessness that denoted some consciousness of the difference in their rank, both to aid the other to comply with his request, and at need to enforce it. But the free-trader seemed to repel the familiarity, for he drew back, at first, like one who shrunk sensitively

from the contact; and then, without touching the arm that was extended with a purpose so equivocal, he passed lightly from the skiff into the barge, declining assistance. The movement was scarcely made, before Ludlow quitted the latter, and occupied the place which Seadrift had just vacated. He commanded one of his men to exchange with the seaman of the brigantine, and having made these preparations, he again addressed his prisoner.

"I commit you to the care of my cockswain, and these worthy tars, Master Seadrift. We shall steer different ways. You will take possession of my cabin, where all will be at your disposal; ere the middle watch is called, I shall be there to prevent the pennant from coming down, and your sea-green flag turning the people's heads from their allegiance."

Ludlow then whispered his orders to his cockswain, and they separated. The barge proceeded to the mouth of the river, with the long and stately sweep of the oars that marks

the progress of a man-of-war's boat, while the skiff followed noiselessly, and, aided by its colour and dimensions, nearly invisible.

When the two boats entered the waters of the bay, the barge held on its course towards the distant ship, while the skiff inclined to the right, and steered directly for the bottom of the cove. The precaution of the dealer in contraband had provided his little boat with muffled sculls, and Ludlow, when he was enabled to discover the fine tracery of the lofty and light spars of the Water Witch, as they rose above the tops of the dwarf trees that lined the shore, had no reason to think his approach was known. Once assured of the presence and position of the brigantine, he was enabled to make his advances with all the caution that might be necessary.

Some ten or fifteen minutes were required to bring the skiff beneath the bowsprit of the beautiful craft, without giving the alarm to those who, doubtless, were watching on her

decks. The success of our adventurer, however, appeared to be complete, for he was soon holding by the cable, and not the smallest sound of any kind had been heard in the brigantine. Ludlow now regretted he had not entered the cove with his barge, for so profound and unsuspecting was the quiet of the vessel, that he doubted not of his ability to have carried her by a coup de main. Vexed by his oversight, and incited by the prospects of success, he began to devise those expedients which would naturally suggest themselves to a seaman in his situation.

The wind was southerly, and though not strong, it was charged with the dampness and heaviness of the night-air. As the brigantine lay protected from the influence of the tides, she obeyed the currents of the other element, and while her bows looked outward, her stern pointed towards the bottom of the basin. The distance from the land was not fifty fathoms, and Ludlow did not fail to perceive that the

vessel rode by a kedge, and that her anchors, of which there were a good provision, were all snugly stowed. These facts induced the hope that he might separate the hawser that alone held the brigantine, which, in the event of his succeeding, he had every reason to believe would drift ashore, before the alarm could be given to her crew, sail set, or an anchor let go. Although neither he nor his companion possessed any other implement to effect this object than the large seaman's knife of the latter, the temptation was too great not to make the trial. The project was flattering; for though the vessel in that situation would receive no serious injury, the unavoidable delay of heaving her off the sands, would enable his boats, and perhaps the ship herself, to reach the place in time to secure their prize. The bargeman was asked for his knife, and Ludlow himself made the first cut upon the solid and difficult mass. The steel had no sooner touched the compact yarns, than a dazzling glare of light shot into the

face of him who held it. Recovering from the shock, and rubbing his eyes, our startled adventurer gazed upwards, with that consciousness of wrong which assails us when detected in any covert act, however laudable may be its motive; a sort of homage that nature, under every circumstance, pays to loyal dealings.

Though Ludlow felt, at the instant of this interruption, that he stood in jeopardy of his life, the concern it awakened was momentarily lost by the spectacle before him. The bronzed and unearthly features of the image were brightly illuminated, and while her eyes looked on him steadily, as if watching his smallest movement, her malign and speaking smile appeared to turn his futile effort into scorn! There was no need to bid the seaman at the oars to do his duty. No sooner did he catch the expression of that mysterious face, than the skiff whirled away from the spot, like a sea-fowl taking wing under alarm. Though Ludlow at each moment expected a shot, even the imminence of the

danger did not prevent him from gazing, in absorbed attention, at the image. The light by which it was illumined, though condensed, powerful, and steadily cast, wavered a little, and exhibited her attire. Then the captain saw the truth of what Seadrift had asserted, for by some process of the machine, into which he had not leisure to inquire, the sea-green mantle had been changed for a slighter robe of the azure of the deep waters. As if satisfied with having betrayed the intention of the sorceress to depart, the light immediately vanished.

"This mummery is well maintained!" muttered Ludlow, when the skiff had reached a distance that assured him of safety. "Here is a symptom that the rover means soon to quit the coast. The change of dress is some signal to his superstitious and deluded crew. It is my task to disappoint his mistress, as he terms her, though it must be confessed that she does not sleep at her post."

During the ten succeeding minutes, our foiled

adventurer had leisure, no less than motive, to feel how necessary is success to any project whose means admit of dispute. Had the hawser been cut, and the brigantine stranded, it is probable that the undertaking of the captain would have been accounted among those happy expedients which, in all pursuits, are thought to distinguish the mental efforts of men particularly gifted by nature; while, under the actual circumstances, he who would have reaped all the credit of so felicitous an idea, was mentally chafing with the apprehension that his unlucky design might become known. His companion was no other than Robert Yarn, the fore-topman, who, on a former occasion, had been heard to affirm that he had already enjoyed so singular a view of the lady of the brigantine, while assisting to furl the fore-top-sail of the Coquette.

"This has been a false board, Master Yarn," observed the captain, when the skiff was past the entrance of the cove, and some distance

down the bay; "for the credit of our cruise, we will not enter the occurrence in the log. You understand me, Sir; I trust a word is sufficient for so shrewd a wit?"

"I hope I know my duty, your honour, which is to obey orders, though it may break owners," returned the top-man. "Cutting a hawser with a knife is but slow work in the best of times; but though one who has little right to speak in the presence of a gentleman so well taught, it is my opinion that the steel is not yet sharpened which is to part any rope aboard yon rover, without the consent of the black-looking woman under her bowsprit."

"And what is the opinion of the berth-deck concerning this strange brigantine that we have so long been following without success?"

"That we shall follow her till the last biscuit is eaten, and the scuttle-butt shall be dry, with no better fortune. It is not my business to teach your honour, but there is not a man in the ship who ever expects to be a farthing the

better for her capture. Men are of many minds concerning the Skimmer of the Seas; but all are agreed that, unless aided by some uncommon luck, which may amount to the same thing as being helped by him who seldom lends a hand to any honest undertaking, that he is altogether such a seaman as another like him does not sail the ocean!"

"I am sorry that my people should have reason to think so meanly of our own skill. The ship has not yet had a fair chance. Give her an open sea, and a cap-full of wind, and she'll defy all the black women that the brigantine can stow. As to your Skimmer of the Seas, man or devil, he is our prisoner."

"And does your honour believe that the trim-built and light-sailing gentleman we overhauled in this skiff, is in truth that renowned rover?" asked Yarn, resting on his sculls, in the interest of the moment. "There are some on board the ship who maintain that the man in

question is taller than the big tide-waiter at Plymouth, with a pair of shoulders—"

"'I have reason to know they are mistaken. If we are more enlightened than our shipmates, Master Yarn, let us be close-mouthed, that others do not steal our knowledge. Hold, here is a crown with the face of King Louis; he is our bitterest enemy, and you may swallow him whole, if you please, or take him in morsels, as shall best suit your humour. But remember that our cruise in the skiff is under secret orders, and the less we say about the anchor-watch of the brigantine the better."

Honest Bob took the piece of silver with a gusto that no opinions of the marvellous could diminish, and touching his hat, he did not fail to make the usual protestations of discretion. That night the messmates of the fore-top-man endeavoured in vain to extract from him the particulars of his excursion with the captain, though the direct answers to their home questions were only evaded by allusions so dark and

ambiguous, as to give to that superstitious feeling of the crew which Ludlow had wished to lull, twice its original force.

Not long after this short dialogue, the skiff reached the side of the Coquette. Her commander found his prisoner in possession of his own cabin, and though grave, if not sad in demeanour, perfectly self-possessed. His arrival had produced a deep effect on the officers and men, though, like Yarn, most of both classes refused to believe that the handsome and gayly attired youth they had been summoned to receive, was the notorious dealer in contraband.

Light observers of the forms under which human qualities are exhibited, too often mistake their outward signs. Though it is quite in reason to believe that he who mingles much in rude and violent scenes should imbibe some of their rough and repelling aspects, still it would seem that, as the stillest waters commonly conceal the deepest currents, so the

powers to awaken extraordinary events, are not unfrequently cloaked under a chastened, and, sometimes, under a cold exterior. It has often happened, that the most desperate and self-willed men are those whose mien and manners would give reason to expect the mildest and most tractable dispositions, while he who has seemed a lion, sometimes proves, in his real nature, to be little better than a lamb.

Ludlow had reason to see that the incredulity of his topman had extended to most on board; and as he could not conquer his tenderness on the subject of Alida and all that concerned her; while on the other hand there existed no motive for immediately declaring the truth, he rather favoured the general impression, by his silence. First giving some orders, of the last importance at that moment, he passed into the cabin, and sought a private interview with his captive.

"That vacant state-room is at your service, Master Seadrift," he observed, pointing to the

little apartment opposite to the one he occupied himself. We are likely to be shipmates several days, unless you choose to shorten the time by entering into a capitulation for the Water-Witch; in which case—"

"You had a proposition to make?".

Ludlow hesitated, cast an eye behind him, to be certain they were alone, and drew nearer to his captive.

"Sir, I will deal with you as becomes a seaman. La Belle Barbérie is dearer to me than ever woman was before;—dearer, I fear, than ever woman will be again. You need not learn that circumstances have occurred,—— Do you love the lady?"

"I do."

"And she—fear not to trust the secret to one who will not abuse the trust—returns she your affection?"

The mariner of the brigantine drew back with dignity, and then instantly recovering his ease, as if fearful he might forget himself, he said with warmth,

"This trifling with woman's weakness is the besetting sin of man! None may speak of her inclinations, Captain Ludlow, but herself. It never shall be said that any of the sex had aught but fitting reverence for their dependant state, their constant and confiding love, their faithfulness in all the world's trials, and their singleness of heart, from me!"

"These sentiments do you honour; and I could wish, for your own sake, as well as that of others, there was less of contrariety in your character. One cannot but grieve—"

"You had a proposition for the brigantine?"

"I would have said, that were the vessel yielded without further pursuit, means might be found to soften the blow to those who will otherwise be most wounded by her capture."

The face of the dealer in contraband had lost some of its usual brightness and animation, the colour of the cheek was not as rich, and the eye was less at ease, than in his former interviews with Ludlow; but a smile of secu-

rity crossed his fine features, when the other spoke of the fate of the brigantine.

"The keel of the ship that is to capture the Water Witch is not yet laid," he said firmly; "nor is the canvass that is to drive her through the water wove! Our mistress is not so heedless as to sleep when there is most occasion for her services."

"This mummery of a supernatural aid may be of use, in holding the minds of the ignorant beings who follow your fortunes in subjection, but it is lost when addressed to me. I have ascertained the position of the brigantine—nay, I have been under her very bowsprit, and so near her cut-water, as to have examined her moorings. Measures are now taking to improve my knowledge, and to secure the prize."

The free-trader heard him without exhibiting alarm, though he listened with an attention that rendered his breathing audible.

"You found my people vigilant?" he rather carelessly observed, than asked.

"So much so, that I have said the skiff was pulled beneath her martingale without a hail! Had there been means, it would not have required many moments to cut the hawser by which she rides, and to have laid your beauteous vessel ashore!"

The gleam of Seadrift's eye was like the glance of an eagle. It seemed to inquire and to resent in the same instant. Ludlow shrunk from the piercing look, and reddened to the brow, whether with his recollections or not it is unnecessary to explain.

"The worthy device was thought of!—nay, it was attempted!" exclaimed the other, gathering confirmation in the consciousness of his companion.—"You did not—you could not succeed!"

"Our success will be proved in the result."

"The lady of the brigantine forgot not her charge! You saw her bright eye—her dark and meaning face! Light shone on that mysterious countenance—my words are true, Lud-

low—thy tongue is silent, but that honest countenance confesses all !"

The gay dealer in contraband turned away, and laughed in his merriest manner.

"I knew it would be so," he continued; "what is the absence of one humble actor from her train! Trust me, you will find her coy as ever, and ill-disposed to hold converse with a cruiser who speaks so rudely through his cannon. Ha !—here are auditors !"

An officer to announce the near approach of a boat entered. Both Ludlow and his prisoner started at this intelligence, and it was not difficult to fancy both believed that a message from the Water Witch might be expected. The former hastened on deck, while the latter, notwithstanding a self-possession that was so much practised, could not remain entirely at his ease. He passed into the state-room, and it is more than probable that he availed himself of the window of its quarter gallery, to

reconnoitre those who were so unexpectedly coming to the ship.

But after the usual hail and reply, Ludlow no longer anticipated any proposal from the brigantine. The answer had been what a seaman would call lubberly; or it wanted that attic purity that men of the profession rarely fail to use on all occasions, and by the means of which they can tell a pretender to their mysteries, with a quickness that is almost instinctive. When the short, quick "boat-ahoy" of the sentinel on the gangway, was answered by the "what do you want?" of a startled respondent in the boat, it was received among the crew of the Coquette, with such a sneer as the tyro who has taken two steps in any particular branch of knowledge, is apt to bestow on the blunders of him who has taken but one.

A deep silence reigned while a party, consisting of two men and as many females, mounted the side of the ship, leaving a sufficient number of forms behind them in the boat

to man its oars. Notwithstanding more than one light was held in such a manner as would have discovered the faces of the strangers had they not all been closely muffled, the party passed into the cabin without recognition.

"Master Cornelius Ludlow, one might as well put on the Queen's livery at once, as to be steering, in this uncertain manner, between the Coquette and the land, like a protested note, sent from endorser to endorser to be paid," commenced Alderman Van Beverout, uncasing himself in the great cabin with the coolest deliberation, while his niece sunk into a chair unbidden, her two attendants standing near in submissive silence. "Here is Alida, who has insisted on paying so unseasonable a visit, and what is worse still, on dragging me in her train, though I am past the day of following a woman about merely because she happens to have a pretty face. The hour is unseasonable, and as to the motive—why, if Master Seadrift has got a little out of his

course, no great harm can come of it while the affair is in the hands of so discreet and amiable an officer as yourself."

The Alderman became suddenly mute, for the door of the state-room opened, and the individual he had named entered in person.

Ludlow needed no other explanation than a knowledge of the persons of his guests, to understand the motive of their visit. Turning to Alderman Van Beverout, he said, with a bitterness he could not repress,

"My presence may be intrusive. Use the cabin as freely as your own house; and rest assured that while it is thus honoured, it shall be sacred to its present uses. My duty calls me to the deck."

The young man bowed gravely, and hurried from the place. As he passed Alida, he caught a gleam of her dark and eloquent eye, and he construed the glance into an expression of gratitude.

CHAPTER II.

"If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly."

Macbeth.

THE words of the immortal poet with which, in deference to an ancient usage in the literature of the language, we have prefaced the incidents to be related in this chapter, are in perfect conformity with that governing maxim of a vessel, which is commonly found embodied in its standing orders, and which prescribes the necessity of exertion and activity in the least of its operations. A strongly manned

ship, like a strong-armed man, is fond of showing its physical power, for it is one of the principal secrets of its efficiency. In a profession in which there is an unceasing contest with the wild and fickle winds, and in which human efforts are to be manifested in the control of a delicate and fearful machinery on an inconstant element, this governing principle becomes of the last importance. Where "delay may so easily be death," it soon gets to be a word that is expunged from the language, and there is perhaps no truth more necessary to be known to all young aspirants for naval success, than that, while nothing should be attempted in a hurry, nothing should be done without the last degree of activity that is compatible with precision.

The commander of the Coquette had early been impressed with the truth of the foregoing rule, and he had not neglected its application in the discipline of his crew. When he reached the deck, therefore, after relinquishing the

cabin to his visitors, he found those preparations which he had ordered to be commenced when he first returned to the ship, already far advanced towards their execution. As these movements are closely connected with the future events it is our duty to explain, we shall relate them with some particularity.

Ludlow had no sooner given his orders to the officer in charge of the deck, than the whistle of the boatswain was heard summoning all hands to their duty. When the crew had been collected, tackles were hooked to the large boats stowed in the centre of the ship, and the whole of them were lowered into the water. The descent of those suspended on the quarters, was of course less difficult and much sooner effected. So soon as all the boats, with the exception of one at the stern, were out, the order was given to "cross top-gallant yards." This duty had been commenced while other things were in the course of performance, and a minute had scarcely passed, before the

upper masts were again in possession of their light sails. Then was heard the usual summons of "all hands up anchor, ahoy!" and the rapid orders of the young officers to "man capstan bars," to "nipper" and finally to "heave away." The business of getting the anchor on board a cruiser and on board a ship engaged in commerce, is of very different degrees of labour, as well as of expedition. In the latter a dozen men apply their powers to a slow-moving and reluctant windlass, while the untractable cable, as it enters, is broken into coils by the painful efforts of a grumbling cook, thwarted perhaps as much as he is aided by the waywardness of some wilful urchin who does the service of the cabin. On the other hand, the upright and constantly moving capstan knows no delay. The revolving "messenger," is ever ready to be applied, and skilful petty officers are always in the tiers to dispose of the massive rope, that it may not encumber the decks.

Ludlow appeared among his people while they were thus employed. Ere he had made one hasty turn on the quarter-deck, he was met by the busy first lieutenant.

"We are short, Sir," said that agent of all-work.

"Set your top-sails."

The canvass was instantly permitted to fall, and it was no sooner stretched to the yards, than force was applied to the haliards, and the sails were hoisted.

"Which way, Sir, do you wish the ship cast?" demanded the attentive Luff.

"To seaward."

The head-yards were accordingly braced aback in the proper direction, and it was then reported to the captain that all was ready to get the ship under weigh.

"Trip the anchor at once, Sir; when it is stowed, and the decks are cleared, report to me."

This sententious and characteristic commu-

nication between Ludlow and his second in command, was sufficient for all the purposes of that moment. The one was accustomed to issue his orders without explanation, and the other never hesitated to obey, and rarely presumed to inquire into their motive.

"We are a-weigh and stowed, Sir; every thing clear," said Mr. Luff, after a few minutes had been allowed to execute the preceding commands.

Ludlow then seemed to arouse himself from a deep reverie. He had hitherto spoken mechanically, rather than as one conscious of what he uttered, or whose feelings had any connection with his words. But it was now necessary to mingle with his officers, and to issue mandates, that, as they were less in routine, required both thought and discretion. The crews of the different boats were "called away," and arms were placed in their hands. When nearly or quite one half of the ship's company were in the boats, and the latter

were all reported to be ready, officers were assigned to each, and the particular service expected at their hands, was distinctly explained.

A master's mate in the captain's barge, with the crew strengthened by half-a-dozen marines, was ordered to pull directly for the cove, into which he was to enter with muffled oars, and where he was to await a signal from the first-lieutenant, unless he met the brigantine endeavouring to escape, in which case his orders were imperative to board and carry her at every hazard. The high-spirited youth no sooner received this charge, than he quitted the ship, and steered to the southward, keeping inside the tongue of land so often named.

Luff was then told to take command of the launch. With this heavy and strongly-manned boat, he was ordered to proceed to the inlet, where he was to give the signal to the barge, and whence he was to go to the assistance of the latter, so soon as he was assured the Water Witch could not again escape by the secret passage.

The two cutters were entrusted to the command of the second lieutenant, with orders to pull into the broad passage between the end of the cape, or the "Hook," and that long narrow island which stretches from the harbour of New York for more than forty leagues to the eastward, sheltering the whole coast of Connecticut from the tempests of the ocean. Ludlow knew, though ships of a heavy draught were obliged to pass close to the cape in order to gain the open sea, that a light brigantine like the Water Witch, could find a sufficient depth of water for her puposes further north. The cutters were therefore sent in that direction, with orders to cover as much of the channel as possible, and to carry the smuggler should an occasion offer. Finally, the yawl was to occupy the space between the two channels, with orders to repeat signals, and to be vigilant in reconnoitering.

While the different officers entrusted with these duties were receiving their instructions,

the ship, under the charge of Trysail, began to move towards the cape. When off the point of the hook, the two cutters and the yawl "cast off,' and took to their oars, and when fairly without the buoys, the launch did the same, each boat taking its prescribed direction.

If the reader retains a distinct recollection of the scene described in one of the earlier pages of this work, he will understand the grounds on which Ludlow based his hopes of success. By sending the launch into the inlet, he believed he should inclose the brigantine on every side; since her escape through either of the ordinary channels would become impossible while he kept the Coquette in the offing. The service he expected from the three boats sent to the northward, was to trace the movement of the smuggler, and should a suitable opportunity offer, to attempt to carry him by surprise.

When the launch parted from the ship, the Coquette came slowly up to the wind, and

with her fore-top-sail thrown to the mast, she lay waiting to allow her boats the time necessary to reach their several stations. The different expeditions had reduced the force of the crew quite one half; and as both the lieutenants were otherwise employed, there now remained on board no officer of a rank between those of the captain and Trysail. Some time after the vessel had been stationary, and the men had been ordered to keep close, or in other words to dispose of their persons as they pleased, with a view to permit them to catch "cats' naps," as some compensation for the loss of their regular sleep, the latter approached his superior, who stood gazing over the hammock-cloths, in the direction of the cove, and spoke.

"A dark night, smooth water, and fresh hands, make boating agreeable duty!" he said. "The gentlemen are in fine heart, and full of young men's hopes; but he who lays that brigantine aboard, will, in my poor judgment,

have more work to do than merely getting up her side. I was in the foremost boat that boarded a Spaniard in the Mona, last war, and though we went into her with light heels, some of us were brought out with broken heads.—I think, the fore-top-gallant-mast has a better set, Captain Ludlow, since we gave the last pull at the rigging?"

"It stands well," returned his half attentive commander. "Give it the other drag, if you think best."

"Just as you please, Sir; 'tis all one to me. I care not if the mast is hove all of one side, like the hat on the head of a country buck; but when a thing is as it ought to be, reason would tell us to let it alone. Mr. Luff was of opinion that by altering the slings of the main-yard we should give a better set to the top-sail sheets; but it was little that could be done with the stick aloft; and I am ready to pay her Majesty the difference between the wear of the sheets as they stand now, and as

Mr. Luff would have them, out of my own pocket, though it is often as empty as a parish church in which a fox-hunting parson preaches. I was present once when a real tally-ho was reading the service, and one of your godless squires got in the wake of a fox with his hounds, within hail of the church windows! The cries had some such effect on my roarer, as a puff of wind would have on this ship; that is to say, he sprung his luff, and though he kept on muttering something, I never knew what, his eyes were in the fields the whole time the pack was in view. But this wasn't the worst of it, for when he got fairly back to his work again, the wind had been blowing the leaves of his book about, and he plumped us into the middle of the marriage ceremony. I am no great lawyer, but there were those who said it was a god-send that half the young men in the parish waren't married to their own grandmothers!"

"I hope the match was agreeable to the family," said Ludlow, relieving one elbow

by resting the weight of his head on the other.

"Why, as to that, I will not take upon me to say, since the clerk corrected the parson's reckoning before the mischief was entirely done. There has been a little dispute between me and the first lieutenant, Captain Ludlow, concerning the trim of the ship. He maintains that we have got too much in forward of what he calls the centre of gravity, and he is of opinion that had we been less by the head, the smuggler would never have had the heels of us in the chase; whereas I invite any man to lay a craft on her water line—"

"Show our light!" interrupted Ludlow. "Yonder goes the signal of the launch!"

Trysail ceased speaking, and stepping on a gun, he also began to gaze in the direction of the cove. A lantern, or some other bright object, was leisurely raised three times, and as often hid from view. The signal came from

under the land, and in a quarter that left no doubt of its object.

"So far well!" cried the captain, quitting his stand, and turning, for the first time, with consciousness to his officer. "'Tis a sign that they are at the inlet, and that the offing is clear. I think, Master Trysail, we are now sure of our prize. Sweep the horizon thoroughly with the night-glass, and then we will close upon this boasted brigantine."

Both took glasses and devoted several minutes to this duty. A careful examination of the margin of the sea, from the coast of New Jersey to that of Long Island, gave them reason to believe that nothing of any size was lying without the cape. The sky was more free from clouds to the eastward than under the land, and it was not difficult to make certain of this important fact. It gave them the assurance that the Water Witch had not escaped by the secret passage during the time lost in their own preparations.

"This is still well," continued Ludlow. "Now he cannot avoid us—show the triangle."

Three lights, disposed in the form just named, were then hoisted at the gaff-end of the Coquette. It was an order for the boats in the cove to proceed. The signal was quickly answered from the launch, and then a small rocket was seen sailing over the trees and shrubbery of the shore. All on board the Coquette listened intently to catch some sound that should denote the tumult of an assault. Once Ludlow and Trysail thought the cheers of seamen came on the thick air of the night, and once, again, either fancy or their senses, told them they heard the menacing hail which commanded the outlaws to submit. Many minutes of intense anxiety succeeded. The whole of the hammock-cloths, on the side of the ship nearest to the land, were lined with curious faces; though respect left Ludlow to the sole occupation of the short and light deck which covered the accommodations, whither he

had ascended, to command a more perfect view of the horizon.

"'Tis time to hear their musketry, or to see the signal of success!" said the young man to himself, so intently occcupied by his interest in the undertaking, as to be unconscious of having spoken.

"Have you forgotten to provide a signal for failure?" said one at his elbow.

"Ha! Master Seadrift;—I would have spared you this spectacle."

"'Tis one too often witnessed to be singular. A life passed on the ocean has not left me ignorant of the effect of night, with a view seaward, a dark coast, and a back-ground of mountain!"

"You have confidence in him left in charge of your brigantine! I shall have faith in your sea-green lady myself, if he escape my boats this time."

"See!—there is a token of her fortune," returned the other, pointing towards three

lanterns that were shewn at the inlet's mouth, and over which many lights were burnt in rapid succession.

" 'Tis of failure! Let the ship fall-off, and square away the yards! Round in, men, round in. We will run down to the entrance of the bay, Mr. Trysail. The knaves have been aided by their lucky star!"

Ludlow spoke with deep vexation in his tones, but always with the authority of a superior and the promptitude of a seaman. The motionless being, near him, maintained a profound silence. No exclamation of triumph escaped him, nor did he open his lips either in pleasure, or in surprise. It appeared as if confidence in his vessel rendered him as much superior to exultation as to apprehension.

" You look upon this exploit of your brigantine, Master Seadrift, as a thing of course;" Ludlow observed, when his own ship was steering towards the extremity of the cape again. " Fortune has not deserted you yet,

but with the land on three sides, and this ship and her boats on the fourth, I do not despair yet of prevailing over your bronzed goddess!"

"Our mistress never sleeps," returned the dealer in contraband, drawing a long breath, like one who had struggled long to repress his interest.

"Terms are still in your power. I shall not conceal that the Commissioners of her Majesty's customs set so high a price on the possession of the Water Witch, as to embolden me to assume a responsibility, from which I might on any other occasion shrink. Deliver the vessel, and I pledge you the honour of an officer, that the crew shall land without question. —Leave her to us with empty decks and a swept hold, if you will, but leave the swift boat in our hands."

"The lady of the brigantine thinks otherwise. She wears her mantle of the deep waters, and, trust me, spite of all your nets, she will lead her followers beyond the offices of

the lead, and far from soundings;—ay! spite of all the navy of Queen Anne!"

"I hope that others may not repent this obstinacy! But this is no time to bandy words; the duty of the ship requires my presence."

Seadrift took the hint, and reluctantly retired to the cabin. As he left the poop, the moon rose above the line of water in the eastern board, and shed its light along the whole horizon. The crew of the Coquette were now enabled to see, with sufficient distinctness, from the sands of the Hook to the distance of many leagues to seaward. There no longer remained a doubt that the brigantine was still within the bay. Encouraged by this certainty, Ludlow endeavoured to forget all motives of personal feeling, in the discharge of a duty that was getting to be more and more interesting as the prospect of its successful accomplishment grew brighter.

It was not long before the Coquette reached the channel, which forms the available mouth of the estuary. Here the ship was again brought

to the wind, and men were sent upon the yards and all her more lofty spars, in order to overlook, by the dim and deceitful light, as much of the inner water as the eye could reach; while Ludlow, assisted by the master, was engaged in the same employment on the deck. Two or three midshipmen were included among the common herd aloft.

"There is nothing visible within," said the captain, after a long and anxious search with a glass. "The shadow of the Jersey mountains prevents the sight in that direction, while the spars of a frigate might be confounded with the trees of Staten Island here, in the northern board.—Cross-jack-yard there!"

The shrill voice of a midshipman answered to the hail.

"What do you make within the Hook, Sir?"

"Nothing visible. Our barge is pulling along the land, and the launch appears to be lying off the inlet; ay, here is the yawl, resting

on its oars without the Romar, but we can find nothing which looks like the cutter in the range of Coney."

"Take another sweep of the glass more westward, and look well into the mouth of the Raritan;—mark you any thing in that quarter?"

"Ha! here is a speck on our lee quarter!"

"What do you make of it?"

"Unless sight deceives me greatly, Sir, there is a light boat pulling in for the ship about three cables' length distant."

Ludlow raised his own glass and swept the water in the direction named. After one or two unsuccessful trials, his eye caught the object, and as the moon had now some power, he was at no loss to distinguish its character. There was evidently a boat, and one that, by its movements, had a design of holding communication with the cruiser.

The eye of a seaman is acute on his element, and his mind is quick in forming opinions on

all things that properly appertain to his profession. Ludlow saw instantly, by the construction, that the boat was not one of those sent from the ship, that it approached in a direction which enabled it to avoid the Coquette, by keeping in a part of the bay where the water was not sufficiently deep to admit of her passage, and that its movements were so guarded as to denote great caution, while there was an evident wish to draw as near to the cruiser as prudence might render advisable. Taking a trumpet, he hailed in the well-known and customary manner.

The answer came up faintly against the air, but it was uttered with much practice in the implement, and with an exceeding compass of voice.

"Ay, ay," and "a parley from the brigantine," were the only words that were distinctly audible.

For a minute or two the young man paced the deck in silence. Then he suddenly com-

manded the only boat which the cruiser now possessed to be lowered and manned.

"Throw an ensign into the stern-sheets," he said, when these orders were executed, "and let there be arms beneath it. We will keep faith while faith is observed, but there are reasons for caution in this interview."

Trysail was directed to keep the ship stationary, and after giving to his subordinate private instructions of importance, in the event of treachery, Ludlow went into the boat in person. A very few minutes sufficed to bring the jolly-boat and the stranger so near each other that the means of communication were both easy and sure. The men of the former were then commanded to cease rowing, and raising his glass, the commander of the cruiser took a more certain and minute survey of those who awaited his coming. The strange boat was dancing on the waves, like a light shell that floated so buoyantly as scarce to touch the element which sustains it, while four athletic

seamen leaned on the oars, which lay ready to urge it ahead. In the stern sheets stood a form whose attitude and mien could not readily be mistaken. In the admirable steadiness of the figure, the folded arms, the fine and manly proportions, and the attire, Ludlow recognized the mariner of the India shawl. A wave of the hand induced him to venture nearer.

"What is asked of the royal cruiser?" demanded the captain of the vessel named, when the two boats were as near each other as seemed expedient.

"Confidence," was the calm reply. "Come nearer, Captain Ludlow; I am here with naked hands. Our conference need not be maintained with trumpets."

Ashamed that a boat belonging to a ship of war should betray doubts, the people of the yawl were ordered to go within reach of the oars.

"Well, Sir, you have your wish. I have quitted my ship and come to the parley with the smallest of my boats."

"It is unnecessary to say what has been done with the others," returned Tiller, across the firm muscles of whose face there passed a smile that was scarcely perceptible. "You hunt us hard, Sir, and give but little rest to the brigantine; but again are you foiled."

"We have a harbinger of better fortune in a lucky blow that has been struck to-night."

"You are understood, Sir. Master Seadrift has fallen into the hands of the Queen's servants; but take good heed! if injury, in word or deed, befal that youth, there live those who well know how to resent the wrong."

"These are lofty expressions to come from a proscribed man; but we will overlook them in the motive. Your brigantine, Master Tiller, lost its master-spirit in the Skimmer of the Seas, and it may be wise to listen to the suggestions of moderation. If you are disposed to treat, I am here with no disposition to extort."

"We meet in a suitable spirit, then, for I

come prepared to offer terms of ransom, that Queen Anne, if she love her revenue, need not despise; but as in duty to her majesty, I will first listen to her royal pleasure."

"First, then, as a seaman, and one who is not ignorant of what a vessel can perform, let me direct your attention to the situation of the parties. I am certain that the Water Witch, though for the moment concealed by the shadows of the hills, or favoured perhaps by distance and the feebleness of this light, is in the waters of the bay. A force, against which she has no power of resistance, watches the inlet; you see the cruiser in readiness to meet her off the Hook. My boats are so stationed as to preclude the possibility of escape, without sufficient notice, by the northern channel; and, in short, the outlets are all closed to your passage. With the morning light we shall know your position, and act accordingly."

"No chart can shew the dangers of rocks and shoals more clearly!—and to avoid these dangers?"

"Yield the brigantine and depart. Though outlawed, we shall content ourselves with the possession of this remarkable vessel in which you do your mischief, and hope that, deprived of the means to err, you will return to better courses."

"With the prayers of the church for our amendment! Now listen, Captain Ludlow, to what I offer. You have the person of one much loved by all who follow the lady of the sea-green mantle, in your power, and we have a brigantine that does much injury to Queen Anne's supremacy in the waters of this hemisphere; yield you the captive, and we promise to quit this coast, never to return."

"This were a worthy treat truly, for one whose habitation is not a mad-house! Relinquish my right over the principal doer of the evil, and receive the unsupported pledge of a subordinate's word! Your happy fortune, Master Tiller, has troubled your reason. What

I offer, is offered because I would not drive an unfortunate and remarkable man, like him we have, to extremities, and—there may be other motives, but do not mistake my lenity. Should force become necessary to put your vessel into our hands, the law may view your offences with a still harsher eye. Deeds which the lenity of our system now considers as venial, may easily turn to crime!"

"I ought not to take your distrust as other than excusable," returned the smuggler, evidently suppressing a feeling of haughty and wounded pride. "The word of a free-trader should have little weight in the ears of a Queen's officer. We have been trained in different schools, and the same objects are seen in different colours. Your proposal has been heard, and, with some thanks for its fair intentions, it is refused without a hope of acceptation. Our brigantine is, as you rightly think, a remarkable vessel! Her equal, Sir, for beauty or speed, floats not the ocean. By Heaven! I would

sooner slight the smiles of the fairest woman that walks the earth, than entertain a thought which should betray the interest I feel in that jewel of naval skill! You have seen her at many times, Captain Ludlow. 'In squalls and calms; with her wings abroad and her pinions shut; by day and night; near and far; fair and foul; and I ask you with a seaman's frankness, is she not a toy to fill a seaman's heart!"

"I deny not the vessel's merits nor her beauty—'tis a pity she bears no better reputation."

"I knew you could not withhold this praise! But I grow childish when there is question of that brigantine! Well, Sir, each has been heard, and now comes the conclusion. I part with the apple of my eye, ere a stick of that lovely fabric is willingly deserted. Shall we make other ransom for the youth?—What think you of a pledge in gold, to be forfeited should we forget our word."

"You ask impossibilities. In treating thus

at all, I quit the path of proud authority, because, as has been said, there is that about the Skimmer of the Seas that raises him above the coarse herd, who in common traffic against the law. The brigantine or nothing."

"My life before that brigantine! Sir, you forget our fortunes are protected by one who laughs at the efforts of your fleet. You think that we are enclosed, and that, when light shall return, there will remain merely the easy task to place your iron-mounted cruiser on our beam, and drive us to seek mercy. Here are honest mariners, who could tell you of the hopelessness of the expedient. The Water Witch has run the gauntlet of all your navies, and shot has never yet defaced her beauty."

"And yet her limbs have been known to fall before a messenger from my ship."

"The stick wanted the commission of our mistress," interrupted the other, glancing his eye at the credulous and attentive crew of the boat. "In a thoughtless moment, 'twas taken

up at sea, and fashioned to our purpose, without counsel from the book. Nothing that touches our decks, under fitting advice, comes to harm. You look incredulous, and 'tis in character to seem so. If you refuse to listen to the lady of the brigantine, at least lend an ear to your own laws. Of what offence can you charge Master Seadrift, that you hold him captive?"

"His redoubted name of Skimmer of the Seas were warranty to force him from a sanctuary," returned Ludlow, smiling. "Though proof should fail of any immediate crime, there is impunity for the arrest, since the law refuses to protect him."

"This is your boasted justice! Rogues in authority combine to condemn an absent and a silent man. But if you think to do your violence with impunity, know there are those who take deep interest in the welfare of that youth."

"This is foolish bandying of menaces," said the captain, warmly. "If you accept my offers,

speak; and if you reject them, abide the consequences."

"I abide the consequences. But since we cannot come to terms, as victor and the submitting party, we may part in amity. Touch my hand, Captain Ludlow, as one brave man should salute another, though the next minute they are to grapple at the throat."

Ludlow hesitated. The proposal was made with so frank and manly a mien, and the air of the free-trader, as he leaned beyond the gunwale of his boat, was so superior to his pursuit, that, unwilling to seem churlish, or to be outdone in courtesy, he reluctantly consented, and laid his palm within that the other offered. The smuggler profited by the junction to draw the boats nearer, and to the amazement of all who witnessed the action, he stepped boldly into the yawl, and was seated, face to face, with its officer in a moment.

"These are matters that are not fit for every ear," said the decided and confident mariner,

in an under tone, when he had made this sudden change in the position of the parties. "Deal with me frankly, Captain Ludlow; is your prisoner left to brood on his melancholy, or does he feel the consolation of knowing that others take an interest in his welfare?"

"He does not want for sympathy, Master Tiller—since he has the pity of the finest woman in America."

"Ha! la Belle Barbérie owns her esteem!—is the conjecture right?"

"Unhappily you are too near the truth. The infatuated girl seems but to live in his presence. She has so far forgotten the opinions of others, as to follow him to my ship!"

Tiller listened intently, and from that instant all concern disappeared from his countenance.

"He who is thus favoured may, for a moment, even forget the brigantine!" he exclaimed, with all his natural recklessness of air. "And the Alderman—?"

"Has more discretion than his niece, since he did not permit her to come alone."

"Enough, Captain Ludlow, let what will follow, we part as friends. Fear not, Sir, to touch the hand of a proscribed man again; it is honest, after its own fashion, and many is the peer and prince who keeps not so clean a palm. Deal tenderly with that gay and rash young sailor; he wants the discretion of an older head, but the heart is kindness itself—I would hazard life to shelter his—but at every hazard the brigantine must be saved. Adieu."

There was strong emotion in the voice of the mariner of the shawl, notwithstanding his high bearing. Squeezing the hand of Ludlow, he passed back into his own barge, with the ease and steadiness of one who made the ocean his home.

"Adieu!" he repeated, signing to his men to pull in the direction of the shoals, where it was certain the ship could not follow. "We may meet again; until then, adieu."

"We are sure to meet, with the return of light."

"Believe it not, brave gentleman. Our lady will thrust the spars under her girdle, and pass a fleet unseen.—A sailor's blessing on you—fair winds and a plenty; a safe land-fall and a cheerful home! Deal kindly by the boy, and in all but evil wishes to my vessel, success light on your ensign!"

The seamen of both boats dashed their oars into the water at the same instant, and the two parties were quickly without the hearing of the voice.

CHAPTER III.

"Did I tell this,
Who would believe me?"
Measure for Measure.

THE time of the interview, related in the close of the preceding chapter, was in the early watches of the night. It now becomes our duty to transport the reader to another, that had place several hours later, and after day had dawned on the industrious burghers of Manhattan.

There stood, near one of the wooden wharves which lined the arm of the sea on which the

city is so happily placed, a dwelling, around which there was every sign that its owner was engaged in a retail commerce, that was active and thriving for that age and country. Notwithstanding the earliness of the hour, the windows of this house were open, and an individual of a busy-looking face thrust his head so often from one of the casements, as to shew that he already expected the appearance of a second party, in the affair that had probably called him from his bed even sooner than common. A tremendous rap at the door relieved his visible uneasiness, and hastening to open it, he received his visitor with much parade of ceremony, and many protestations of respect in person.

"This is an honour, my Lord, that does not often befal men of my humble condition," said the master of the house, in the flippant utterance of a vulgar cockney; "but I thought it would be more agreeable to your Lordship to receive the a—a—here, than in the place where your Lordship just at this moment resides.

Will your Lordship please to rest yourself, after your Lordship's walk?"

"I thank you, Carnaby," returned the other, taking the offered seat with an air of easy superiority. "You judge with your usual discretion, as respects the place, though I doubt the prudence of seeing him at all. Has the man come?"

"Doubtless, my Lord; he would hardly presume to keep your Lordship waiting, and much less would I countenance him in so gross a disrespect. He will be most happy to wait on you, my Lord, whenever your Lordship shall please."

"Let him wait; there is no necessity for haste. He has probably communicated some of the objects of this extraordinary call on my time, Carnaby, and you can break them, in the intervening moments."

"I am sorry to say, my Lord, that the fellow is as obstinate as a mule. I felt the impropriety of introducing him, personally, to

your Lordship, but as he insisted he had affairs that would deeply interest you, my Lord, I could not take upon me to say, what would be agreeable to your Lordship, or what not; and so I was bold enough to write the note."

"And a very properly expressed note it was, Master Carnaby. I have not received a better worded communication since my arrival in this colony."

"I am sure the approbation of your Lordship might justly make any man proud! It is the ambition of my life, my Lord, to do the duties of my station, in a proper manner, and to treat all above me with a suitable respect, my Lord, and all below me, as in reason bound. If I might presume to think, in such a matter, my Lord, I should say, that these colonists are no great judges of propriety in their correspondence, or indeed in any thing else."

The noble visitor shrugged his shoulder, and threw an expression into his look, that encouraged the retailer to proceed.

"It is just what I think myself, my Lord," he continued simpering; "but then," he added, with a condoling and patronising air—"how should they know any better! England is but an island after all, and the whole world cannot be born and educated on the same bit of earth."

"'Twould be inconvenient, Carnaby, if it led to no other unpleasant consequence."

"Almost word for word what I said to Mrs. Carnaby myself no later than yesterday, my Lord, only vastly better expressed. 'Twould be inconvenient, said I, Mrs. Carnaby, to take in the other lodger, for every body cannot live in the same house, which covers, as it were, the ground taken in your Lordship's sentiment. I ought to add in behalf of the poor woman, that she expressed, on the same occasion, strong regrets that it is reported your Lordship will be likely to quit us soon on your return to old England."

"That is really a subject on which there is more cause to rejoice than to weep. This im-

prisoning or placing within limits so near a relative of the crown, is an affair that must have unpleasant consequences, and which offends sadly against all propriety."

"It is awful, my Lord! If it be not sacrilege, by the law, the greater the shame of the opposition in Parliament, who defeat so many other wholesome regulations intended for the good of the subject."

"Faith, I am not sure I may not be driven to join them myself, bad as they are, Carnaby; for this neglect of ministers, not to call it by a worse name, might goad a man to even a more heinous measure."

"I am sure nobody could blame your Lordship were your Lordship to join anybody or anything but the French! I have often told Mrs. Carnaby as much as that, in our frequent conversations concerning the unpleasant situation in which your Lordship is just now placed."

"I had not thought the awkward transaction attracted so much notice," observed the other, evidently wincing under the allusion.

"It attracts it only in a proper and respectful way, my Lord: neither Mrs. Carnaby nor myself ever indulges in any of these remarks but in the most proper and truly English manner."

"The reservation might palliate a greater error. That word proper is a prudent term, and expresses all one could wish. I had not thought you so intelligent and shrewd a man, Master Carnaby; clever in the way of business, I always knew you to be, but so apt in reason, and so matured in principle, is what I will confess I had not expected. Can you form no conjecture of the business of this man?"

"Not in the least, my Lord. I pressed the impropriety of a personal interview; for though he alluded to some business or other, I scarcely know what, with which he appeared to think your Lordship had some connection, I did not understand him, and we had like to have parted without an explanation."

"I will not see the fellow."

"Just as your Lordship pleases. I am sure that after so many little affairs have passed through my hands, I might be safely trusted with this, and I said as much; but as he positively refused to make me an agent, and he insisted that it was so much to your Lordship's interests, why, I thought, my Lord, that perhaps—just now—"

"Show him in."

Carnaby bowed low and submissively, and after busying himself in placing the chairs aside, and adjusting the table more conveniently for the elbow of his guest, he left the room.

"Where is the man I bid you keep in the shop?" demanded the retailer, in a coarse, authoritative voice, when without, addressing a meek and humble-looking lad, who did the duty of clerk. "I warrant me, he is left in the kitchen, and you have been idling about on the walk! A more heedless and inattentive lad than yourself, is not to be found in America, and the sun never rises but I repent

having signed your indentures. You shall pay for this, you—"

The appearance of the person he sought, cut short the denunciations of the obsequious grocer and the domestic tyrant. He opened the door, and having again closed it, left his two visitors together.

Though the degenerate descendant of the great Clarendon had not hesitated to lend his office to cloak the irregular and unlawful trade that was then so prevalent in the American seas, he had paid the sickly but customary deference to virtue, of refusing on all occasions to treat personally with its agents. Sheltered behind his official and personal rank, he had soothed his feelings, by tacitly believing that cupidity is less venal when its avenues are hidden, and that in protecting his station from an immediate contact with its ministers, he had discharged an important, and, for one in his situation, an imperative duty. Unequal to the exercise of virtue itself, he thought he had done enough in

preserving some of its seemliness. Though far from paying even this slight homage to decency, in his more ordinary habits, his pride of rank had on the subject of so coarse a failing induced him to maintain an appearance which his pride of character would not have suggested. Carnaby was much the most degraded and the lowest of those with whom he ever condescended to communicate directly; and even with him there might have been some scruple, had not his necessities caused him to stoop so far as to accept pecuniary assistance from one he both despised and detested.

When the door opened, therefore, the Lord Cornbury rose, and, determined to bring the interview to a speedy issue, he turned to face the individual who entered with a mien into which he threw all the distance and hauteur that he thought necessary for such an object. But he encountered, in the mariner of the India shawl, a very different man from the flattering and obsequious grocer who had just quitted

him. Eye met eye, his gaze of authority receiving a look as steady if not as curious as his own. It was evident by the composure of the fine manly frame he saw, that its owner rested his claims on the aristocracy of nature. The noble forgot his acting under the influence of surprise, and his voice expressed as much of admiration as command when he said—

"This then is the Skimmer of the Seas?"

"Men call me thus: if a life passed on oceans give a claim to the title, it has been fairly earned."

"Your character — I may say that some portions of your history—are not unknown to me. Poor Carnaby, who is a worthy and an industrious man, with a growing family dependent on his exertions, has entreated me to receive you, or there might be less apology for this step than I could wish. Men of a certain rank, Master Skimmer, owe so much to their station, that I rely on your discretion."

"I have stood in nobler presences, my Lord,

and found so little change by the honour, that I am not apt to boast of what I see. Some of princely rank have found their profit in my acquaintance."

"I do not deny your usefulness, Sir; it is only the necessity of prudence, I would urge. There has been, I believe, some sort of implied contract between us—at least so Carnaby explains the transaction, for I rarely enter into these details, myself—by which you may perhaps feel some right to include me in the list of your customers. Men in high places must respect the laws, and yet it is not always convenient, or even useful, that they should deny themselves every indulgence which policy would prohibit to the mass. One who has seen as much of life as yourself, needs no explanations on this head, and I cannot doubt but our present interview will have a satisfactory termination."

The Skimmer scarce deemed it necessary to conceal the contempt that caused his lip to

curl, while the other was endeavouring to mystify his cupidity, and when the speaker was done, he merely expressed an assent by a slight inclination of the head. The ex-governor saw that his attempt was fruitless, and by relinquishing his masquerade, and yielding more to his natural propensities and tastes, he succeeded better.

"Carnaby has been a faithful agent," he continued, "and by his reports it would seem that our confidence has not been misplaced. If fame speaks true, there is not a more dexterous navigator of the narrow seas than thyself, Master Skimmer. It is to be supposed that your correspondents on this coast, too, are as lucrative as I doubt not they are numerous."

"He who sells cheap can never want a purchaser. I think your Lordship has no reason to complain of prices."

"As pointed as his compass! Well, Sir, as I am no longer master here, may I ask the object of this interview?"

"I have come to seek your interest in behalf of one who has fallen into the grasp of the Queen's officers."

"Hum—the amount of which is, that the cruiser in the bay has entrapped some careless smuggler. We are none of us immortal, and an arrest is but a legal death to men of your persuasion in commerce. Interest is a word of many meanings. It is the interest of one man to lend, and of another to borrow; of the creditor to receive, and of the debtor to avoid payment. Then there is interest at court, and interest in court; in short, you must deal more frankly, ere I can decide on the purport of your visit."

"I am not ignorant that the Queen has been pleased to name another governor over this colony, or that your creditors, my Lord, have thought it prudent to take a pledge for their dues in your person. Still I must think that one who stands so near the Queen in blood, and who, sooner or later, must enjoy both rank and

fortune in the mother country, will not solicit so slight a boon as that I ask, without success. This is the reason I prefer to treat with you."

"As clear an explanation as the shrewdest casuist could desire! I admire your succinctness, Master Skimmer, and confess you for the pink of etiquette. When your fortune shall be made, I recommend the court circle as your place of retirement. Governors, creditors, queen, and imprisonment, all as compactly placed in the same sentence, as if it were the creed written on a thumb-nail! Well, Sir, we will suppose my interest what you wish it.—Who and what is the delinquent?"

"One named Seadrift, a useful and a pleasant youth, who passes much between me and my customers; heedless and merry in his humours, but dear to all in my brigantine, because of tried fidelity and shrewd wit. We could sacrifice the profits of the voyage that he were free. To me he is a necessary agent, for his skill in the judgment of rich tissues, and other luxuries

that compose my traffic, is exceeding; and I am better fitted to guide the vessel to her haven, and to look to her safety amid shoals and in tempests, than to deal in these trifles of female vanity."

"So dexterous a go-between should not have mistaken a tide-waiter for a customer—how befel the accident?"

"He met the barge of the Coquette at an unlucky moment, and as we had so lately been chased off the coast by the cruiser, there was no choice but to arrest him."

"The dilemma is not without embarrassment. When once his mind is settled, it is no trifle that will amuse this Mr. Ludlow. I do not know a more literal construer of his orders in the fleet; a man, Sir, who thinks words have but a single set of meanings, and who knows as little as can be imagined of the difference between a sentiment and a practice."

"He is a seaman, my Lord, and he reads his instruction with a seaman's simplicity. I think

none the worse of him that he cannot be tempted from his duty ; for let us understand the right as we will, our service once taken, it becomes us all to do it faithfully."

A small red spot came and went on the cheek of the profligate Cornbury. Ashamed of his weakness, he affected to laugh at what he had heard, and continued the discourse.

" Your forbearance and charity might adorn a churchman, Master Skimmer," he answered. " Nothing can be more true, for this is an age of moral truths, as witness the Protestant succession. Men are now expected to perform, and not to profess. Is the fellow of such usefulness that he may not be abandoned to his fate?"

" Much as I doat on my brigantine—and few men set their affections on woman with a stronger love—I would see the beauteous craft degenerate to a cutter for the Queen's revenue, before I will entertain the thought! But I will not anticipate a long and painful imprisonment for the youth, since those who are not

altogether powerless already take a deep and friendly concern in his safety."

"You have overcome the Brigadier!" cried the other, in a burst of exultation that conquered the little reserve of manner he had thought it necessary to maintain; "that immaculate and reforming representative of my royal cousin has bitten of the golden bait, and proves a true colony governor after all!"

"Lord Viscount, no. What we have to hope, or what we have to fear, from your successor is to me a secret."

"Ply him with promises, Master Skimmer—set golden hopes before his imagination; set gold itself before his eyes, and you will prosper. I will pledge my expected earldom that he yields! Sir, these distant situations are like so many half-authorized mints, in which money is to be coined, and the only counterfeit is your mimic representative of Majesty. Ply him with golden hopes; if mortal, he will yield!"

"And yet, my Lord, I have met men who

preferred poverty and their opinions to gold and the wishes of others."

"The dolts were lusus naturæ!" exclaimed the dissolute Cornbury, losing all his reserve, in a manner that better suited his known and confirmed character. "You should have caged them, Skimmer, and profited by their dulness to lay the curious under contribution. Don't mistake me, Sir, if I speak a little in confidence. I hope I know the difference between a gentleman and a leveller as well as another, but trust me, this Mr. Hunter is human, and he will yield if proper appliances are used. And you expect from me—"

"The exercise of that influence which cannot fail of success; since there is a courtesy between men of a certain station, which causes them to overlook rivalry in the spirit of their caste. The cousin of Queen Anne can yet obtain the liberty of one, whose heaviest crime is a free-trade, though he may not be able

to keep his own seat in the chair of the government."

"Thus far, indeed, my poor influence may yet extend, provided the fellow be not named in any act of outlawry. I would gladly enough, Mr. Skimmer, end my deeds in this hemisphere with some act of graceful mercy, if, indeed, I saw the means."

"They shall not be wanting. I know the law is like any other article of great price; some think that Justice holds the balance, in order to weigh her fees. Though the profits of this hazardous and sleepless trade of mine be much overrated, I would gladly line her scales with two hundred broad pieces, to have that youth again safe in the cabin of the brigantine."

As the Skimmer of the Seas thus spoke, he drew, with the calmness of a man who saw no use in circumlocution, a heavy bag of gold from beneath his frock, and deposited it, without a second look at the treasure, on the table. When this offering was made, he turned aside, less by

design than by a careless movement of the body, and when he faced his companion again, the bag had vanished.

"Your affection for the lad is touching, Master Skimmer," returned the corrupt Cornbury; "it were a pity such friendship should be wasted. Will there be proof to insure his condemnation?"

"It may be doubted. His dealings have only been with the higher class of my customers, and with but few of them. The care I now take is more in tenderness to the youth than with any great doubts of the result. I shall count you, my Lord, among his protectors, in the event that the affair is noised?"

"I owe it to your frankness. But will Mr. Ludlow content himself with the possession of an inferior, when the principal is so near, and shall we not have a confiscation of the brigantine on our hands?"

"I charge myself with the care of all else. There was indeed a lucky escape only the last

night, as we lay at a light kedge, waiting for the return of him who has been arrested. Profiting by the possession of our skiff, the commander of the Coquette himself got within the sweep of my hawse—nay, he was in the act of cutting the very fastenings, when the dangerous design was discovered. 'Twould have been a fate unworthy of the Water Witch, to be cast on shore like a drifting log, and to check her noble career by some such a seizure as that of a stranded waif!"

"You avoided the mischance?"

"My eyes are seldom shut, Lord Viscount, when danger is nigh. The skiff was seen in time, and watched, for I knew that one in whom I trusted was abroad.—When the movement grew suspicious, we had our means of frightening this Mr. Ludlow from his enterprise, without recourse to violence."

"I had not thought him one to be scared from following up a business like this."

"You judged him rightly—I may say we

judged him rightly. But when his boats sought us, at our anchorage, the bird had flown."

"You got the brigantine to sea in season?" observed Cornbury, not sorry to believe that the vessel was already off the coast.

"I had other business. My agent could not be thus deserted, and there were affairs to finish in the city. Our course lay up the bay."

"Ha! Master Skimmer, 'twas a bold step, and one that says little for your discretion!"

"Lord Viscount, there is safety in courage," calmly, and perhaps ironically, returned the other. "While the Queen's captain closed all the outlets, my little craft was floating quietly under the hills of Staten. Before the morning watch was set, she passed these wharves, and she now awaits her captain in the broad basin that lies beyond the bend of yonder headland."

"This is a hardiness to be condemned! A failure of wind, a change of tide, or any of the mishaps common to the sea, may throw you on

the mercy of the law, and will greatly embarrass all who feel an interest in your safety."

"So far as this apprehension is connected with my welfare, I thank you much, my Lord; but trust me, many hazards have left me but little to learn in this particular. We shall run the Hell Gate, and gain the open sea by the Connecticut Sound."

"Truly, Master Skimmer, one has need of nerves to be your confidant! Faith in a compact constitutes the beauty of social order; without it, there is no security for interests, nor any repose for character. But faith may be implied, as well as expressed; and when men, in certain situations, place their dependence on others who should have motives for being wary, the first are bound to respect, even to the details of a most scrupulous construction, the conditions of the covenant. Sir, I wash my hands of this transaction, if it be understood that testimony is to be accumulated against us by

thus putting your Water Witch in danger of trial before the Admiralty."

"I am sorry that this is your decision," returned the Skimmer. "What is done cannot be recalled, though I still hope it may be remedied. My brigantine now lies within a league of this, and 'twould be treachery to deny it. Since it is your opinion, my Lord, that our contract is not valid, there is little use in its seal—the broad pieces may still be serviceable in shielding that youth from harm."

"You are as literal in construction, Master Skimmer, as a school-boy's version of his Virgil. There is an idiom in diplomacy, as well as in language, and one who treats so sensibly should not be ignorant of its phrases. Bless me! Sir, an hypothesis is not a conclusion, any more than a promise is a performance. That which is advanced by way of supposition, is but the ornament of reasoning, while your gold has the more solid character of demonstration. Our bargain is made."

The unsophisticated mariner regarded the noble casuist a moment, in doubt whether to acquiesce in this conclusion or not, but ere he had decided on his course, the windows of the room were shaken violently, and then came the heavy roar of a piece of ordnance.

"The morning gun!" exclaimed Cornbury; who started at the explosion, with the sensitiveness of one unworthily employed.—"No! 'tis an hour past the rising of the sun!"

The Skimmer shewed no yielding of the nerves, though it was evident, by his attitude of thought, and the momentary fixedness of his eye, that he foresaw danger was near. Moving to the window, he looked out on the water, and instantly drew back, like one who wanted no further evidence.

"Our bargain then is made," he said, hastily approaching the Viscount, whose hand he seized, and wrung in spite of the other's obvious reluctance to allow the familiarity; "our bargain then is made. Deal fairly by the youth,

and the deed will be remembered; deal treacherously, and it shall be revenged!"

For one instant longer the Skimmer held the member of the effeminate Cornbury imprisoned, and then raising his cap, with a courtesy that appeared more in deference to himself than his companion, he turned on his heel, and with a firm, but quick step, he left the house.

Carnaby, who entered on the instant, found his guest in a state between resentment, surprise, and alarm. But habitual levity soon conquered other feeling, and finding himself freed from the presence of a man who had treated him with so little ceremony, the Ex-Governor shook his head, like one accustomed to submit to evils he could not obviate, and assumed the ease and insolent superiority he was accustomed to maintain in the presence of the obsequious grocer.

"This may be a coral, or a pearl, or any other precious gem of the ocean, Master Carnaby," he said, unconscious himself that he was,

in a manner, endeavouring to cleanse his violated hand from the touch it had endured, by the use of his handkerchief, "but it is one on which the salt-water hath left its crust. Truly it is to be hoped that I am never again to be blockaded by such a monster, or I may better say, harpooned; for the familiarity of the boatswain is more painful than any inventions of his brethren of the deep can prove to their relative the leviathan. Has the clock told the hour?"

"'Tis not yet six, my Lord, and there is abundant leisure for your Lordship to return in season to your Lordship's lodgings. Mrs. Carnaby has dared to flatter herself that your Lordship will condescend to honour us so far as to taste a dish of bohea under our humble roof."

"What is the meaning of that gun, Master Carnaby? It gave the alarm to the smuggler, as if it had been a summons from Execution Dock, or a groan from the ghost of Kidd."

"I never presumed to think, my Lord. I suppose it to be some pleasure of her Majesty's officers in the fort, and when that is the case, one is quite certain that all is proper and very English, my Lord."

"'Fore George, Sir, English or Dutch, it had the quality to frighten this sea-fowl—this curlew —this albatross, from his perch!"

"Upon my duty to your Lordship, your Lordship has the severest wit of any gentleman in her Majesty's kingdom! But all the nobility and gentry are so witty, that it is quite an honour and an edification to hear them! If it is your Lordship's pleasure, I will look out of the window, my Lord, and see if there be any thing visible."

"Do so, Master Carnaby—I confess a little curiosity to know what has given the alarm to my sea-lion. Hah! do I not see the masts of a ship moving above the roofs of yonder line of stores?"

"Well, your Lordship has the quickest eye

and the happiest way of seeing things, of any nobleman in England! Now I should have stared a quarter of an hour before I thought of looking over the roofs of those stores at all; and yet your Lordship looks there at the very first glance."

"Is it a ship, or a brig, Master Carnaby?—you have the advantage of position, for I would not willingly be seen—speak quickly, dolt! is it ship, or brig?"

"My Lord—'tis a brig—or a ship—really I must ask your Lordship, for I know so little of these things—"

"Nay, complaisant Master Carnaby, have an opinion of your own for one moment, if you please—there is smoke curling upward, behind those masts!"

Another rattling of windows, and a second report, removed all doubts on the subject of the firing. At the next instant, the bows of a vessel of war appeared at the opening of a ship-yard, and then came gun after gun in

view, until the whole broadside and frowning battery of the Coquette were visible.

The Viscount sought no further solution of the reason why the Skimmer had left him so hurriedly. Fumbling a moment in a pocket, he drew forth a hand filled with broad pieces of gold. These he appeared about to lay upon the table, but, as it were by forgetfulness, he kept the member closed, and bidding the grocer adieu, he left the house with as firm a resolution as was ever made by any man, conscious of having done both a weak and a wicked action, of never again putting himself in familiar contact with so truckling a miscreant.

CHAPTER IV.

"What care these roarers
For the name of king?"

Tempest.

THE Manhattanese will readily comprehend the situation of the two vessels; but those of our countrymen who live in distant parts of the Union, may be glad to have the localities explained.

Though the vast estuary which receives the Hudson and so many minor streams, is chiefly made by an indentation of the continent, that portion of it which forms the port of New

York is separated from the ocean by the happy position of its islands. Of the latter there are two, which give the general character to the basin, and even to a long line of coast, while several that are smaller, serve as useful and beautiful accessories to the haven and to the landscape. Between the Bay of Rariton and that of New York there are two communications, one between the Islands of Staten and Nassau, called the Narrows, which is the ordinary ship-channel of the port, and the other between Staten and the Main, which is known by the name of the Kilns. It is by means of the latter, that vessels pass into the neighbouring waters of New Jersey, and have access to so many of the rivers of that state. But while the Island of Staten does so much for the security and facilities of the port, that of Nassau produces an effect on a great extent of coast. After sheltering one half of the harbour from the ocean, the latter approaches so near the continent as to narrow the passage

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between them to the length of two cables, and then stretching away eastward for the distance of a hundred miles, it forms a wide and beautiful sound. After passing a cluster of islands, at a point which lies forty leagues from the city, by another passage, vessels can gain the open sea.

The seaman will at once understand that the tide of flood must necessarily flow into these vast estuaries from different directions. The current which enters by Sandy Hook (the scene of so much of this tale) flows westward into the Jersey rivers, northward into the Hudson, and eastward along the arm of the sea that lies between Nassau and the Main. The current that comes by the way of Montauk, or the eastern extremity of Nassau, raises the vast basin of the Sound, fills the streams of Connecticut, and meets the western tide at a place called Throgmorton, and within twenty miles of the city.

As the size of the estuaries is so great, it is

scarcely necessary to explain that the pressure of so wide sheets of water, causes the currents, at all the narrow passes, to be exceedingly rapid; since that equal diffusion of the element which depends on a natural law, must, wherever there is a deficiency of space, be obtained by its velocity. There is, consequently, a quick tide, throughout the whole distance, between the harbour and Throgmorton; while it is permitted to poetic licence to say that at the narrowest part of the channel, the water darts by the land, like an arrow parting from its bow. Owing to a sudden bend in the course of the stream, which makes two right angles within a short distance, the dangerous position of many rocks that are visible and more that are not, and the confusion produced by currents, counter-currents and eddies, this critical pass has received the name of "Hell-Gate." It is memorable for causing many a gentle bosom to palpitate with a terror that is a little exaggerated by the boding name, though it is constantly the cause of pecuniary

losses, and has in many instances been the source of much personal danger. It was here that a British frigate was lost, during the war of the revolution, in consequence of having struck a rock called "the Pot," the blow causing the ship to fill and to founder so suddenly, that even some of her people are said to have been drowned. A similar, but a greatly lessened effect, is produced in the passage among the islands, by which vessels gain the ocean at the eastern extremity of the Sound; though the magnitude of the latter sheet of water is so much greater than that of Rariton Bay, and the harbour of New York, that the force of its pressure is diminished by a corresponding width in the outlets. With these explanations, we shall return to the thread of the narrative.

When the person who has so long been known in our pages by the nom de guerre of Tiller, gained the open street, he had a better opportunity of understanding the nature of the danger which so imminently pressed upon the

brigantine. With a single glance at the symmetrical spars and broad yards of the ship that was sweeping past the town, he knew her to be the Coquette. The little flag at her fore-top-gallant-mast sufficiently explained the meaning of the gun; for the two, in conjunction with the direction the ship was steering, told him in language that any seaman could comprehend, that she demanded a Hell-Gate pilot. By the time the Skimmer reached the end of a lone wharf, where a light and swift rowing-boat awaited his return, the second report bespoke the impatience of his pursuers to be furnished with the necessary guide.

Though the navigation in this Republic, coast-wise, now employs a tonnage equalling that used in all the commerce of any other nation of Christendom, England alone excepted, it was of no great amount at the commencement of the eighteenth century. A single ship lying at the wharves, and two or three brigs and schooners at anchor in the rivers, composed

the whole shew of sea vessels then in port. To these were to be added some twenty smaller coasters and river-craft, most of whom were the shapeless and slow-moving masses which then plied, in voyages of a month's duration, between the two principal towns of the colony. The appeal of the Coquette, therefore, at that hour and in that age, was not likely to be quickly answered.

The ship had got fairly into the arm of the sea which separates the island of Manhattan from that of Nassau; and though it was not then, as now, narrowed by artificial means, its tide was so strong, as, aided by the breeze, to float her swiftly onward. A third gun shook the windows of the city, causing many a worthy burgher to thrust his head through his casement, and yet no boat was seen pulling from the land, nor was there any other visible sign that the signal would be speedily obeyed. Still the royal cruiser stood steadily on, with sail packed above sail, and every sheet of canvass spread

that the direction of a wind, which blew a little forward of the beam, would allow.

"We must pull for our own safety, and that of the brigantine, my men," said the Skimmer, springing into his boat and seizing the tiller. "A quick stroke and a strong: here is no time for holiday feathering, or your man-of-war jerk! Give way, boys; give way, with a will and together."

These were sounds that had often saluted the ears of men engaged in the hazardous pursuit of his crew. The oars fell into the water at the same moment, and quick as thought the light bark was in the strength of the current.

The short range of wharves was soon passed, and, ere many minutes, the boat was gliding up with the tide between the bluffs of Long Island, and the projection which forms the angle on that part of Manhattan. Here the Skimmer was induced to sheer more into the centre of the passage, in order to avoid the eddies formed by the point, and to preserve the whole benefit of

the current. As the boat approached Coerlers, his eye was seen anxiously examining the wider reach of the water, that began to open above, in quest of his brigantine. Another gun was heard. A moment after the report, there followed the whistling of a shot, and then succeeded the rebound on the water, and the glittering particles of the spray. The ball glanced a few hundred feet further, and skipping from place to place, it soon sunk into the element.

"This Mr. Ludlow is disposed to kill two birds with the same stone," coolly observed the Skimmer, not even bending his head aside to note the position of the ship. "He wakes the burghers of the town with his noise, while he menaces our boat with his bullets. We are seen, my friends, and have no dependence but our own manhood, with some assistance from the lady of the sea-green mantle. A quicker stroke and a strong! You have the Queen's cruiser before you, Master Coil; does she shew boats on her quarters, or are the davits empty?"

The seaman addressed pulled the stroke-oar of the boat, and consequently he faced the Coquette. Without in the least relaxing his exertions, he rolled his eyes over the ship, and answered with a steadiness that shewed him to be a man accustomed to situations of hazard.

"His boat-falls are as loose as a mermaid's locks, your Honour, and he shews few men in his tops; there are enough of the rogues left, however, to give us another shot."

"Her Majesty's servants are early awake this morning. Another stroke or two, hearts of oak, and we throw them behind the land!"

A second shot fell into the water, just without the blades of the oars, and then the boat, obedient to its helm, whirled round the point, and the ship was no longer visible. As the cruiser was shut in by the formation of the land, the brigantine came into view, on the opposite side of Coerlers. Notwithstanding the calmness that reigned in the features of the

Skimmer, one who studied his countenance closely, might have seen an expression of concern shadowing his manly face, as the Water Witch first met his eye. Still he spoke not, concealing his uneasiness, if in truth he felt any, from those whose exertions were, at that moment, of the last importance. As the crew of the expecting vessel saw their boat, they altered their course, and the two were soon together.

"Why is that signal still flying?" demanded the Skimmer, the instant his foot touched the deck of his brigantine, and pointing, as he spoke, at the little flag that fluttered at the head of the forward mast.

"We keep it aloft to hasten off the pilot," was the answer.

"Has not the treacherous knave kept faith!" exclaimed the Skimmer, half recoiling in surprise. "He has my gold, and in return I hold fifty of his worthless promises. Ha! the laggard is in yon skiff; ware the brig round and

meet him, for moments are as precious now as water in a desert."

The helm was a-weather, and the lively brigantine had already turned more than half aside, when another gun drew every eye towards the point. The smoke was seen rising above the bend of the land, and presently the head-sails, followed by all the hull and spars of the Coquette, came into view. At that instant a voice from forward announced that the pilot had turned, and was rowing with all his powers towards the shore. The imprecations that were heaped on the head of the delinquent were many and deep; but it was no time for indecision. The two vessels were not half a mile apart, and now was the moment to shew the qualities of the Water Witch. Her helm was shifted, and, as if conscious herself of the danger that threatened her liberty, the beautiful fabric came sweeping up to her course; and inclining to the breeze, with one heavy flap of the canvass, she glided ahead with all her

wonted ease. But the royal cruiser was a ship of ten thousand! For twenty minutes the nicest eye might have been at a loss to say which lost or which gained, so equally did the pursuer and the pursued hold on their way. As the brigantine was the first, however, to reach the narrow passage formed by Blackwell's, her motion was favoured by the increasing power of the stream. It would seem that this change, slight as it was, did not escape the vigilance of those in the Coquette, for the gun which had been silent so long, again sent forth its flame and smoke. Four discharges, in less than so many minutes, threatened a serious disadvantage to the free-traders. Shot after shot passed among their spars, and opened wide rents in the canvass. A few more such assaults would deprive them of their means of motion. Aware of the crisis, the accomplished and prompt seaman who governed her movements, needed but an instant to form his decision.

The brigantine was now nearly up with the

head of Blackwell's. It was half-flood on a spring tide. The reef that projects from the western end of the island, far into the reach below, was nearly covered, but still enough was visible to shew the nature of the barrier it presented to a passage from one shore to the other. There was one rock, near the island itself, which lifted its black head high above the water. Between this dark mass of stone and the land, there was an opening of some twenty fathoms in width. The Skimmer saw, by the even and unbroken waves that rolled through the passage, that the bottom lay less near to the surface of the water in that opening than at any other point along the line of reef. He commanded the helm a-weather once more, and calmly trusted to the issue.

Not a man on board that brigantine was aware that the shot of the royal cruiser was whistling between their masts, and damaging their gear, as the little vessel glided into the narrow opening. A single blow on the rock

would have been destruction, and the lesser danger was entirely absorbed in the greater. But when the passage was cleared, and the true stream in the other channel gained, a common shout proclaimed both the weight of their apprehension and their relief. In another minute the head of Blackwell's protected them from the shot of their pursuers.

The length of the reef prevented the Coquette from changing her direction, and her draught of water closed the passage between the rock and the island. But the deviation from the straight course, and the passage of the eddies, had enabled the ship, which came steadily on, to range up nearly abeam of her chase. Both vessels, though separated by the long narrow island, were now fairly in the force of those currents which glide so swiftly through the confined passages. A sudden thought glanced on the mind of the Skimmer, and he lost no time in attempting to execute its suggestion. Again the helm was put up, and the image of

the sea-green lady was seen struggling to stem the rapid waters. Had this effort been crowned with success, the triumph of her followers would have been complete; since the brigantine might have reached some of the eddies of the reach below, and leaving her heavier pursuer to contend with the strength of the tide, she would have gained the open sea by the route over which she had so lately passed. But a single minute of trial convinced the bold mariner that his decision came too late. The wind was insufficient to pass the gorge, and environed by the land, with a tide that grew stronger at each moment, he saw that delay would be destruction. Once more the light vessel yielded to the helm, and with every thing set to the best advantage, she darted along the passage.

In the mean time the Coquette had not been idle. Borne on by the breeze, and floating with the current, she had even gained upon her chase; and as her lofty and light sails drew

strongest over the land, there was every prospect of her first reaching the eastern end of Blackwell's. Ludlow saw his advantage, and made his preparations accordingly.

There needs little explanation to render the circumstances which brought the royal cruiser up to town intelligible to the reader. As the morning approached she had entered more deeply into the bay, and, when the light permitted, those on board her had been able to see that no vessel lay beneath the hills, nor in any of the more retired places of the estuary. A fisherman, however, removed the last of their doubts, by reporting that he had seen a vessel whose description answered that of the Water Witch, passing the Narrows in the middle watch. He added, that a swiftly-rowing boat was, shortly after, seen pulling in the same direction. This clue had been sufficient. Ludlow made a signal for his own boats to close the passages of the Kilns and the Narrows, and

then, as has been seen, he steered directly into the harbour.

When Ludlow found himself in the position just described, he turned all his attention to the double object of preserving his own vessel, and arresting that of the free-trader. Though there was still a possibility of damaging the spars of the brigantine, by firing across the land, the feebleness of his own crew, reduced as it was by more than half its numbers, the danger of doing injury to the farm-houses that were here and there placed along the low cliffs, and the necessity of preparation to meet the critical pass ahead, united to prevent the attempt. The ship was no sooner fairly entered into the pass between Blackwell's and Nassau, than he issued an order to secure the guns that had been used, and to clear away the anchors.

"Cock-bill the bowers, Sir," he hastily added, in his orders to Trysail. "We are in no condition to sport with stock-and-fluke; have every thing ready to let go at a word;

and see the grapnels ready—we will throw them aboard the smuggler as we close, and take him alive. Once fast to the chain, we are yet strong enough to haul him in under our scuppers, and to capture him with the pumps! Is the signal still abroad for a pilot?"

"We keep it flying, Sir, but 'twill be a swift boat that overhauls us in this tide's way. The Gate begins at yonder bend in the land, Captain Ludlow?"

"Keep it abroad; the lazy rogues are sometimes loitering in the cove this side the rocks, and chance may throw one of them aboard us as we pass. See to the anchors, Sir! the ship is driving through this channel, like a race-horse under the whip!"

The men were hurriedly piped to this duty, while their young commander took his station on the poop, now anxiously examining the courses of the tides, and the positions of the eddies, and now turning his eyes towards the brigantine, whose upper spars and white sails

were to be seen, at the distance of two hundred fathoms, glancing past the trees of the island. But miles and minutes seemed like rods and moments, in that swift current. Trysail had just reported the anchors ready, when the ship swept up abreast of the cove, where vessels often seek an anchorage to await favourable moments for entering the Gate. Ludlow saw, at a glance, that the place was entirely empty. For an instant he yielded to the heavy responsibility—a responsibility before which a seaman sooner shrinks than before any other—that of charging himself with the duty of the pilot, and he thought of running into the anchorage for shelter. But another glimpse at the spars of the brigantine caused him to waver.

"We are near the Gate, Sir!" cried Trysail, in a voice that was full of warning.

"Yon daring mariner stands on."

"The rogue sails his vessel without the Queen's permission, Captain Ludlow. They tell me this is a passage that has been well named!"

"I have been through it, and will vouch for its character—he shews no signs of anchoring!"

"If the woman who points his course can carry him through safely, she deserves her title. We are passing the cove, Captain Ludlow!"

"We are past it," returned Ludlow, breathing heavily. "Let there be no whisper in the ship—pilot or no pilot, we now sink or swim!"

Trysail had ventured to remonstrate, while there was a possibility of avoiding the danger, but, like his commander, he now saw that all depended on their own coolness and care. He passed busily among the crew; saw that each brace and bowline was manned; cautioned the few young officers who continued on board to vigilance; and then awaited the orders of his superior, with the composure that is so necessary to a seaman in the moment of trial. Ludlow himself, while he felt the load of responsibility he had assumed, succeeded equally well in maintaining an outward calm. The ship was irretrievably in the Gate, and no human power

could retrace the step. At such moments of intense anxiety, the human mind is wont to seek support in the opinions of others. Notwithstanding the increasing velocity, and the critical condition of his own vessel, Ludlow cast a glance, in order to ascertain the determination of the Skimmer of the Seas. Blackwell's was already behind them, and as the two currents were again united, the brigantine had luffed up into the entrance of the dangerous passage, and now followed within two hundred feet of the Coquette, directly in her wake. The bold and manly-looking mariner who controlled her, stood between the night-heads, just above the image of his pretended mistress, where he examined the foaming reefs, the whirling eddies, and the varying currents, with folded arms and a riveted eye. A glance was exchanged between the two officers, and the free-trader raised his sea-cap. Ludlow was too courteous not to return the salutation, and then all his senses were engrossed by the care of the ship. A

rock lay before them, over which the water broke in a loud and unceasing roar. For an instant it seemed that the vessel could not avoid the danger, and then it was already past.

"Brace up," said Ludlow, in the calm tones that denote a forced tranquillity.

"Luff!" called out the Skimmer, so quickly as to shew that he took the movements of the cruiser for his guide. The ship came closer to the wind, but the sudden bend in the stream no longer permitted her to steer in a direct line, with its course. Though drifting to windward with vast rapidity, her way through the water, which was greatly increased by the contrary actions of the wind and tide, caused the cruiser to shoot across the current, while a reef, over which the water madly tumbled, lay immediately in her course. The danger seemed too imminent for the observances of nautical etiquette, and Trysail called aloud that the ship must be thrown aback, or she was lost.

"Hard-a-lee!" shouted Ludlow, in the

strong voice of authority. "Up with every thing—tacks and sheets; main-top-sail haul!"

The ship seemed as conscious of her danger as any on her decks. The bows whirled away from the foaming reef, and as the sails caught the breeze on their opposite surfaces, they aided in bringing her head in the contrary direction. A minute had scarcely passed ere she was aback, and in the next she was about and full again. The intensity of the brief exertion kept Trysail fully employed, but no sooner had he leisure to look ahead, than he again called aloud—

"Here is another roarer under her bows; luff, Sir, luff, or we are upon it!"

"Hard down your helm!" once again came in deep tones from Ludlow. "Let fly your sheets—throw all aback, forward and aft—away with the yards, with a will, men!"

There was need for all of these precautions. Though the ship had so happily escaped the dangers of the first reef, a turbulent and roar-

ing cauldron in the water, which, as representing the element in ebullition, is called the Pot, lay so directly before her, as to render the danger apparently inevitable. But the power of the canvass was not lost on this trying occasion. The forward motion of the ship diminished, and as the current still swept her swiftly to windward, her bows did not enter the rolling waters until the hidden rocks which caused the commotion had been passed. The yielding vessel rose and fell in the agitated water, as if in homage to the whirlpool, but the deep keel was unharmed.

"If the ship shoot ahead twice her length more, her bows will touch the eddy," exclaimed the vigilant master.

Ludlow looked around him for a single moment in indecision. The waters were whirling and roaring on every side, and the sails began to lose their power, as the ship drew near the bluff, which forms the second angle in this critical pass. He saw, by objects on the land, that

he still approached the shore, and he had recourse to the seaman's last expedient.

"Let go both anchors!" was the final order.

The fall of the massive iron into the water was succeeded by the rumbling of the cable. The first effort to check the progress of the vessel appeared to threaten dissolution to the whole fabric, which trembled under the shock from its mast heads to the keel. But the enormous ropes again yielded, and smoke was seen rising round the wood which held it. The ship whirled with the sudden check, and sheered wildly in towards the shore. Met by the helm, and again checked by the efforts of the crew, she threatened to defy restraint. There was an instant when all on board expected to hear the cable snap, but the upper sails filled, and as the wind was now brought over the taffrail, the force of the current was, in a great degree, met by that of the breeze. The ship answered her helm, and became stationary, while the water

foamed against her cut-water, as if she were driven ahead with the power of a brisk breeze.

The time, from the moment when the Coquette entered the Gate to that when she anchored below the Pot, though the distance was near a mile, seemed but a minute. Certain, however, that his ship was now checked, the thoughts of Ludlow returned to their other duties with the quickness of lightning.

"Clear away the grapnels!" he eagerly cried. "Stand by to heave and haul in!—heave!"

But that the reader may better comprehend the motive of this sudden order, he must consent to return to the entrance of the dangerous passage, and accompany the Water Witch also in her hazardous experiment to get through without a pilot.

The abortive attempt of the brigantine to stem the tide at the western end of Blackwell's, will be remembered. It had no other effect than to place her pursuer more in advance, and

to convince her own commander that he had now no other resource than to continue his course, for had he anchored, boats would have ensured his capture. When the two vessels appeared off the eastern end of the island, the Coquette was ahead, a fact that the experienced free-trader did not at all regret. He profited by the circumstance to follow her movements, and to make a favourable entrance into the uncertain currents. To him Hell-Gate was known only by its fearful reputation among mariners, and unless he might avail himself of the presence of the cruiser, he had no other guide than his own general knowledge of the power of the element.

When the Coquette had tacked, the calm and observant Skimmer was satisfied with throwing his head-sails flat to the mast. From that instant the brigantine lay floating in the current, neither advancing nor receding a foot, and always keeping her position at a safe distance from the ship that was so adroitly made to answer the

purposes of a beacon. The sails were watched with the closest care, and so nicely was the delicate machine tended, that it would have been, at any moment, in her people's power to have lessened her way by turning to the stream. The Coquette was followed till she anchored, and the call on board the cruiser to heave the grapnels had been given, because the brigantine was, apparently, floating directly down on her broadside.

When the grapnels were hove from the royal cruiser, the free-trader stood on the low poop of his little vessel, within fifty feet of him who had issued the order. There was a smile of indifference on his firm mouth, while he silently waved a hand to his own crew. The signal was obeyed by bracing round their yards, and suffering all the canvass to fill. The brigantine shot quickly ahead, and the useless irons fell heavily into the water.

"Many thanks for your pilotage, Captain Ludlow!" cried the daring and successful mari-

ner of the shawl, as his vessel, borne on by wind and current, receded rapidly from the cruiser. "You will find me off Montauk; for affairs still keep us on the coast. Our lady has, however, put on the blue mantle, and, ere many settings of the sun, we shall look for deep water. Take good care of her Majesty's ship, I pray thee, for she has neither a more beautiful nor a faster!"

One thought succeeded another, with the tumult of a torrent, in the mind of Ludlow. As the brigantine lay directly under his broadside, the first impulse was to use his guns; but at the next moment he was conscious that before they could be cleared, distance would render them useless. His lips had nearly parted, with intent to order the cables cut; but he remembered the speed of the brigantine, and hesitated. A sudden freshening of the breeze decided his course. Finding that the ship was enabled to keep her station, he ordered the crew to thrust the whole of the enormous ropes through the hawse-holes,

and, freed from the restraint, he abandoned the anchors, until an opportunity to reclaim them should offer.

The operation of slipping the cables consumed several minutes, and when the Coquette, with every thing set, was again steering in pursuit, the Water Witch was already beyond the reach of her guns. Both vessels, however, held on their way, keeping as near as possible to the centre of the stream, and trusting more to fortune than to any knowledge of the channel for safety.

When passing the two small islands that lie at no great distance from the Gate, a boat was seen moving towards the royal cruiser. A man in it pointed to the signal which was still flying, and offered his services.

"Tell me," demanded Ludlow, eagerly, "has yonder brigantine taken a pilot?"

"By her movements I judge not. She brushed the sunken rock off the mouth of Flushing Bay, and as she passed, I heard the

song of the lead. I should have gone on board myself, but the fellow rather flies than sails; and as for signals, he seems to mind none but his own!"

"Bring us up with him, and fifty guineas is thy reward!"

The slow-moving pilot, who in truth had just awoke from a refreshing sleep, opened his eyes, and seemed to gather a new impulse from the promise. When his questions were asked and answered, he began deliberately to count on his fingers all the chances that still existed of a vessel whose crew was ignorant of the navigation, falling into their hands.

"Admitting that, by keeping mid-channel, she goes clear of White Stone and Frogs," he said, giving to Throgmorton's its vulgar name, "he must be a wizard to know that the Stepping Stones lie directly across his course, and that a vessel must steer away northerly, or bring up on rocks that will as surely hold him as if he were built there.

Then he runs his chance for the Executioners, which are as prettily placed as needs be, to make our trade flourish; besides the Middle Ground further east, though I count but little on that, having often tried to find it myself, without success. Courage, noble captain; if the fellow be the man you say, we shall get a nearer look at him before the sun sets, for certainly he who has run the Gate without a pilot in safety, has had as much good luck as can fall to his share in one day."

The opinion of the East River Branch proved erroneous. Notwithstanding the hidden perils by which she was environed, the Water Witch continued her course with a speed that increased as the wind rose with the sun, and with an impunity from harm, that amazed all who were in the secret of her situation. Off Throgmorton's there was, in truth, a danger that might even have baffled the sagacity of the followers of the mysterious lady, had they not been aided by accident. This is the

point where the straitened arm of the sea expands into the basin of the Sound. A broad and inviting passage lies directly before the navigator, while like the flattering prospects of life, numberless hidden obstacles are in wait to arrest the unheeding and ignorant.

The Skimmer of the Seas was deeply practised in all the intricacies and dangers of shoals and rocks. Most of his life had been passed in threading the one or in avoiding the other. So keen and quick had his eye become in detecting the presence of any of those signs which forwarn the mariner of danger, that a ripple on the surface, or a deeper shade in the colour of the water, rarely escaped his vigilance. Seated on the top-sail-yard of his brigantine, he had overlooked the passage from the moment they were through the Gate, and issued his mandates to those below, with a precision and promptitude that was not surpassed by the trained conductor of the Coquette himself. But when his sight embraced the wide reach of

water that lay in front, as his little vessel swept round the head-land of Throgmorton, he believed there no longer existed a reason for so much care. Still there was a motive for hesitation. A heavily moulded and dull-sailing coaster was going eastward, not a league ahead of the brigantine, while one of the light sloops of those waters was coming westward, still further in the distance. Notwithstanding the wind was favourable to each alike, both vessels had deviated from the direct line, and were steering towards a common centre near an island that was placed more than a mile to the northward of the straight course. A mariner like him of the India shawl, could not overlook so obvious an intimation of a change in the channel. The Water Witch was kept away, and her lighter sails were lowered, in order to allow the royal cruiser, whose lofty canvass was plainly visible above the land, to draw near. When the Coquette was seen also to diverge, there no longer remained a doubt of the direc-

tion necessary to be taken, and every thing was quickly set upon the brigantine, even to her studding sails. Long ere she reached the island, the two coasters had met, and each again changed its course, reversing that on which the other had just been sailing. There was, in these movements, as plain an explanation as a seaman could desire, that the pursued were right. On reaching the island, therefore, they again luffed into the wake of the schooner, and having nearly crossed the sheet of water, they passed the coaster, receiving an assurance in words, that all was now plain sailing before them.

Such was the famous passage of the Skimmer of the Seas, through the multiplied and hidden dangers of the eastern channel. To those who have thus accompanied him, step by step, through its intricacies and alarms, there may seem nothing extraordinary in the event, but coupled as it was with the character previously earned by that bold mariner, and occur-

ring, as it did, in an age when men were more disposed than at present to put faith in the marvellous, the reader will not be surprised to learn, that it greatly increased his reputation for daring, and had no small influence on an opinion, which was by no means uncommon, that the dealers in contraband were singularly favoured by a power which greatly exceeded that of Queen Anne and all her servants.

CHAPTER V.

"— Thou shalt see me at Philippi."
Julius Cæsar.

THE commander of her Brittanic Majesty's ship Coquette slept that night in the hammock-cloths. Before the sun had set, the light and swift brigantine, by following the gradual bend of the land, had disappeared in the eastern board, and it was no longer a question of overtaking her by speed. Still sail was crowded on the royal cruiser, and long ere the period when Ludlow threw himself, in his clothes, between the ridge-ropes of the quarter-deck,

the vessel had gained the broadest part of the Sound, and was already approaching the islands that form the "Race."

Throughout the whole of that long and anxious day, the young sailor had held no communication with the inmates of the cabin. The servants of the ship had passed to and fro, but though the door seldom opened that he did not bend his eyes feverishly in its direction, neither the Alderman, his niece, the captive, nor even François or the negress, made her appearance on the deck. If any there felt an interest in the result of the chase, it was concealed in a profound and almost mysterious silence. Determined not to be outdone in indifference, and goaded by feelings which, with all his pride, he could not overcome, our young seaman took possession of the place of rest we have mentioned, without using any measures to resume the intercourse.

When the first watch of the night was come, sail was shortened on the ship, and from that

moment till the day dawned again, her captain seemed buried in sleep. With the appearance of the sun, however, he arose, and commanded the canvass to be spread once more, and every exertion made to drive the vessel forward to her object.

The Coquette reached the Race early in the day, and shooting through the passage on an ebb tide, she was off Montauk at noon. No sooner had the ship drawn past the cape, and reached a point where she felt the breeze and the waves of the Atlantic, than men were sent aloft, and twenty eyes were curiously employed in examining the offing. Ludlow remembered the promise of the Skimmer to meet him at that spot, and notwithstanding the motives which the latter might be supposed to have for avoiding the interview, so great was the influence of the free-trader's manner and character, that the young captain entertained secret expectations the promise would be kept.

"The offing is clear!" said the young cap-

tain in a tone of disappointment, when he lowered his glass; "and yet that rover does not seem a man to hide his head in fear—"

"Fear—that is to say, fear of a Frenchman, and a decent respect for her Majesty's cruisers, are very different sorts of things," returned the master. "I never got a bandanna, or a bottle of your Cogniac ashore in my life, that I did not think every man that I passed in the street could see the spots in the one, or scent the flavour of the other; but then I never supposed this shyness amounted to more than a certain suspicion in my own mind, that other people know when a man is running on an illegal course. I suppose that one of your rectors, who is snugly anchored for life in a good warm living, would call this conscience; but for my own part, Captain Ludlow, though no great logician in matters of this sort, I have always believed that it was natural concern of mind lest the articles should be seized. If this Skimmer of the Seas comes out to give us another chase,

in rough water, he is by no means as good a judge of the difference between a large and a small vessel as I had thought him; and I confess, Sir, I should have more hopes of taking him, were the woman under his bowsprit fairly burnt."

"The offing is clear!"

"That is it, with a show of the wind holding here at south-half-south. This bit of water that we have passed, between yon island and the main, is lined with bays, and while we are here looking out for them on the high seas, the cunning varlets may be trading in any one of the fifty good basins that lie between the cape and the place where we lost him. For aught we know, he may have run westward again in the night-watches, and be, at this moment, laughing in his sleeve at the manner in which he dodged a cruiser."

"There is too much truth in what you say, Trysail, for if the Skimmer be now disposed to avoid us, he has certainly the means in his power."

"Sail, oh!" cried the look-out, on the main-top-gallant-yard.

"Where-a-way?"

"Broad on the weather beam, Sir; here, in a range with the light cloud that is just lifting from the water."

"Can you make out the rig?"

"'Fore George, the fellow is right!" interrupted the master. "The cloud caused her to be unseen; but here she is, sure enough, a full-rigged ship, under easy canvass, with her head to the westward!"

The look of Ludlow through the glass was long, attentive, and grave.

"We are weak-handed to deal with a stranger," he said, when he returned the instrument to Trysail. "You see he has nothing but his topsails set: a shew of canvass that would satisfy no trader in a breeze like this!"

The master was silent, but his look was even longer and more critical than that of his captain When it had ended, he cast a cautious glance

towards the diminished crew, who were curiously regarding the vessel, that had now become sufficiently distinct by a change in the position of the cloud, and then answered in an undertone—

"'Tis a Frenchman, or I am a whale! One may see it by his short yards and the hoist of his sails: ay, and 'tis a cruiser, too; for no man who had a profit to make on his freight, would be lying there under short canvass, and his port within a day's run."

"Your opinion is my own: would to Heaven our people were all here! This is but a short complement to take into action with a ship whose force seems equal to our own. What number can we count?"

"We are short of seventy—a small muster for four-and-twenty guns, with yards like these to handle."

"And yet the port may not be insulted! We are known to be on this coast—"

"We are seen!" interrupted the master; "the

fellow has worn ship, and he is already setting his top-gallant-sails!"

There no longer remained any choice between downright flight and preparations for combat. The former would have been easy, for an hour would have taken the ship within the cape; but the latter was far more in consonance with the spirit of the service to which the Coquette belonged. The order was therefore given for "all hands to clear ship for action." It was in the reckless nature of sailors to exult in this summons, for success and audacity go hand in hand; and long familiarity with the first had, even at that early day, given a confidence that often approached temerity to the seamen of Great Britain and her dependencies. The mandate to prepare for battle was received by the feeble crew of the Coquette, as it had often been received before, when her decks were filled with the number necessary to give full efficiency to her armament, though a few of the older and more experienced of the mariners

—men in whom confidence had been diminished by time—were seen to shake their heads, as if they doubted the prudence of the intended contest.

Whatever might have been the secret hesitation of Ludlow when the character and force of his enemy were clearly established, he betrayed no signs of irresolution from the moment when his decision appeared to be taken. The necessary orders were issued calmly, and with the clearness and readiness that perhaps constitute the greatest merit of a naval captain. The yards were slung in chains; the booms were sent down; the lofty sails were furled; and, in short, all the preparations that were then customary, were made with the usual promptitude and skill. Then the drum beat to quarters; and when the people were at their stations, their young commander had a better opportunity of examining into the true efficiency of his ship. Calling to the master, he ascended the poop, in order that they might confer toge-

ther with less risk of being overheard, and at the same time better observe the manœuvres of the enemy.

The stranger had, as Trysail perceived, suddenly worn round on his heel, and laid his head to the northward. The change in the course brought him before the wind; and as he immediately spread all the canvass that would draw, he was approaching fast. During the time occupied in preparation on board the Coquette, his hull had risen, as it were, from out of the water, and Ludlow and his companion had not studied his appearance long, from the poop, before the streak of white paint, dotted with ports, which marks a vessel of war, became visible to the naked eye. As the cruiser of Queen Anne continued also to steer in the direction of the chase, half an hour more brought them sufficiently near to each other to remove all doubts of their respective characters and force. The stranger then came to the wind, and made his preparation for combat.

"'The fellow shows a stout heart and a warm battery," observed the master, when the broadside of their enemy became visible by this change in his position. "Six-and-twenty teeth, by my count; though the eye-teeth must be wanting, or he would never be so fool-hardy as to brave Queen Anne's Coquette in this impudent fashion! A prettily-turned boat, Captain Ludlow, and one nimble enough in her movements. But look at his top-sails. Just like his character, Sir, all hoist; and with little or no head to them. I'll not deny but that the hull is well enough, for that is no more than carpenter's work; but when it comes to the rig, or trim, or cut of a sail, how should a l'Orient or a Brest man understand what is comely? There is no equalling, after all, a good, wholesome, honest English topsail, which is neither too narrow in the head, nor too deep in the hoist; with a bolt-rope of exactly the true size, robands, and earings, and bowlines that look as if they grew there, and sheets that neither nature nor art

could alter to advantage. Here are these Americans, now, making innovations in ship-building, and in the sparring of vessels, as if any thing could be gained by quitting the customs and opinions of their ancestors! Any man may see that all they have about them that is good for any thing is English, while all their nonsense and new-fangled changes come from their own vanity."

"They get along, Master Trysail, notwithstanding," returned the captain, who, though a sufficiently loyal subject, could not forget his birth-place; "and many is the time this ship—one of the finest models of Plymouth—has been bothered to overhaul the coasters of these seas. Here is the brigantine, that has laughed at us on our best tack, and with our choice of wind!"

"One cannot say where that brigantine was built, Captain Ludlow. It may be here, it may be there; for I look upon her as a nondescript, as old Admiral Top used to call the galliots of the

north seas: but concerning these new American fashions, of what use are they, I would ask, Captain Ludlow? In the first place, they are neither English nor French, which is as much as to confess they are altogether outlandish: in the second place, they disturb the harmony and established usages among wrights and sail-makers; and though they may get along well enough now, sooner or later, take my word for it, they will come to harm. It is unreasonable to suppose that a new people can discover any thing in the construction of a ship, that has escaped the wisdom of seamen as old——the Frenchman is clueing up his top-gallant-sails, and means to let them hang, which is much the same as condemning them at once;—and therefore I am of opinion that all these new fashions will come to no good."

"Your reasoning is absolutely conclusive, Master Trysail," returned the Captain, whose thoughts were differently employed. "I agree

with you it would be safer for the strongest to send down his yards."

"There is something manly and becoming in seeing a ship strip herself as she comes into action, Sir! It is like a boxer taking off his jacket with the intention of making a fair stand-up fight of it.—That fellow is filling away again, and means to manœuvre before he comes up fairly to his work."

The eye of Ludlow had never quitted the stranger. He saw that the moment for serious action was not distant; and bidding Trysail keep the vessel on her course, he descended to the quarter-deck. For a single instant the young commander paused, with his hand on the door of the cabin, and then, overcoming his reluctance, he entered the apartment.

The Coquette was built after a fashion much in vogue a century since, and which, by a fickleness that influences marine architecture as well as less important things, is again coming into use for vessels of her force. The accommodations

of the commander were on the same deck with the batteries of the ship, and they were frequently made to contain two, or even four, guns of the armament. When Ludlow entered his cabin, therefore, he found a crew stationed around the gun which was placed on the side next the enemy, and all the customary arrangements made which precede a combat. The state-rooms abaft, however, as well as the little apartment which lay between them, were closed. Glancing his eye about him, and observing the carpenters in readiness, he made a signal for them to knock away the bulk-heads, and lay the whole of the fighting part of the ship in common. While this duty was going on, he entered the after-cabin.

Alderman Van Beverout and his companions were found together, and evidently in expectation of the visit they now received. Passing coolly by the former, Ludlow approached his niece, and taking her hand, he led her to the quarter-deck, making a sign for her female atten-

dant to follow. Descending into the depths of the ship, the captain conducted his charge into a part of the berth-deck that was below the water-line, and as much removed from danger as she could well be, without encountering a foul air, or sights that might be painful to one of her sex and habits.

"Here is as much safety as a vessel of war affords in a moment like this," he said, when his companion was silently seated on a mess-chest. "On no account quit the spot, till I, or some other, advise you it may be done without hazard."

Alida had submitted to be led thither without a question. Though her colour went and came, she saw the little dispositions that were made for her comfort, and without which, even at that moment, the young sailor could not quit her, in the same silence. But when they were ended, and her conductor was about to retire, his name escaped her lips by an exclamation that seemed hurried and involuntary.

"Can I do aught else to quiet your apprehensions?" the young man inquired, though he studiously avoided her eye, as he turned to put the question. "I know your strength of mind, and that you have a resolution which exceeds the courage of your sex, else I would not venture so freely to point out the danger which may beset one, even here, without a self-command and discretion that shall restrain all sudden impulses of fear."

"Notwithstanding your generous interpretation of my character, Ludlow, I am but woman, after all."

"I did not mistake you for an Amazon," returned the young man, smiling, perceiving that she checked her words by a sudden effort. "All I expect from you is the triumph of reason over female terror. I shall not conceal that the odds, perhaps I may say that the chances, are against us; and yet the enemy must pay for my ship ere he has her! She will be none the worse defended, Alida, from the consciousness that

thy liberty and comfort depend, in some measure, on our exertions.—Would you say more?"

La Belle Barbérie struggled with herself, and she became calm, at least in exterior.

"There has been a singular misconception between us, and yet is this no moment for explanations! Ludlow, I would not have you part with me, at such a time as this, with that cold and reproachful eye!"

She paused. When the young man ventured to raise his look, he saw the beautiful girl standing with a hand extended towards him, as if offering a pledge of amity, while the crimson on her cheek, and her yielding but half-averted eye spoke with the eloquence of maiden modesty. Seizing the hand, he answered, hastily—

"Time was, when this action would have made me happy—"

The young man paused, for his gaze had unconsciously become riveted on the rings of the

hand he held. Alida understood the look, and, drawing one of the jewels, she offered it, with a smile that was as attractive as her beauty.

"One of these may be spared," she said. "Take it, Ludlow, and when thy present duty shall be performed, return it as a gage that I have promised thee, no explanation which you may have a right to ask, shall be withheld."

The young man took the ring, and forced it on the smallest of his fingers, in a mechanical manner, and with a bewildered look, that seemed to inquire if some one of those which remained was not the token of a plighted faith. It is probable that he might have continued the discourse, had not a gun been fired from the enemy. It recalled him to the more serious business of the hour. Already more than half disposed to believe all he could wish, he raised the fair hand which had just bestowed the boon to his lips, and rushed upon deck.

"The Monsieur is beginning to bluster," said Trysail, who had witnessed the descent of his commander, at that moment and on such an errand, with great dissatisfaction. "Although his shot fell short, it is too much to let a Frenchman have the credit of the first word."

"He has merely given the weather gun; the signal of defiance. Let him come down, and he will not find us in a hurry to leave him!"

"No, no; as for that we are snug enough!" returned the master, chuckling as he surveyed the half-naked spars, and the light top-hamper, to which he had himself reduced the ship. "If running is to be our play, we have made a false move at the beginning of the game. These top-sails, spanker and jib, make a show that says more for bottom than for speed. Well, come what will of this affair, it will leave me a master, though it is beyond the power of the best duke in England to rob me of my share of the honour!"

With this consolation for his perfectly hope-

less condition as respects promotion, the old seaman walked forward, examining critically into the state of the vessel, while his young commander, having cast a look about him, motioned to his prisoner and the Alderman to follow to the poop.

"I do not pretend to inquire into the nature of the tie which unites you with some in this ship," Ludlow commenced, addressing his words to Seadrift, though he kept his gaze on the recent gift of Alida; "but that it must be strong, is evident by the interest they have taken in your fate. One who is thus esteemed should set a value on himself. How far you have trifled with the laws, I do not wish to say; but here is an opportunity to redeem some of the public favour. You are a seaman, and need not be told that my ship is not as strongly manned as one could wish her at this moment, and that the services of every Englishman will be welcome. Take charge of these six guns,

and depend on my honour, that your devotion to the flag shall not go unrequited."

"You much mistake my vocation, noble Captain," returned the dealer in contraband, faintly laughing. "Though one of the seas, I am one more used to the calm latitudes, than to these whirlwinds of war. You have visited the brigantine of our mistress, and must have seen that her temple resembles that of Janus more than that of Mars. The deck of the Water Witch has none of this frowning garniture of artillery."

Ludlow listened in amazement. Surprise, incredulity and scorn, was each, in turn, expressed in his frowning countenance.

"This is unbecoming language for one of your calling," he said, scarce deeming it necessary to conceal the contempt he felt. "Do you acknowledge fealty to this ensign—are you an Englishman?"

"I am such as Heaven was pleased to make

me—fitter for the zephyr than the gale—the jest, than the war-shout—the merry moment, than the angry mood."

"Is this the man whose name for daring has passed into a proverb!—the dauntless, reckless, skilful Skimmer of the Seas?"

"North is not more removed from south, than I from him in the qualities you seek! It was not my duty to undeceive you as to the value of your captive, while he whose services are beyond price to our mistress was still on the coast. So far from being him you name, brave Captain, I claim to be no more than one of his agents, who, having some experience in the caprices of woman, he trusts to recommend his wares to female fancies. Though so useless in inflicting injuries, I may make bold however to rate myself as excellent at consolation. Suffer that I appease the fears of la Belle Barbérie during the coming tumult, and you shall own, that one more skilful in that merciful office is rare indeed?"

"Comfort whom, where, and what thou wilt, miserable effigy of manhood!—but hold, there is less of terror than of artifice in that lurking smile and treacherous eye!"

"Discredit both, generous Captain! On the faith of one who can be sincere at need, a wholesome fear is uppermost, whatever else the disobedient members may betray. I could fain weep rather than be thought valiant just now!"

Ludlow listened in wonder. He had raised an arm to arrest the retreat of the young mariner, and by a natural movement his hand slid along the limb it had grasped, until it held that of Seadrift. The instant he touched the soft and ungloved palm, an idea, as novel as it was sudden, crossed his brain. Retreating a step or two, he examined the light and agile form of the other from the head to the feet. The frown of displeasure which had clouded his brow, changed to a look of unfeigned surprise, and for the first time, the tones of the

voice came over his recollection as being softer and more melodious than is wont in man.

"Truly thou art not the Skimmer of the Seas!" he exclaimed, when his short examination was ended.

"No truth more certain. I am one of little account in this rude encounter; though were that gallant seaman here," and the colour deepened on the cheeks of Seadrift as he spoke, "his arm and counsel might prove a host! Oh! I have seen him in scenes far more trying than this, when the elements have conspired with other dangers. The example of his steadiness and spirit has given courage even to the feeblest heart in the brigantine! Now, suffer me to offer consolation to the timid Alida."

"I should little merit her gratitude were the request refused," returned Ludlow. "Go, gay and gallant Master Seadrift! If the enemy fears thy presence on the deck, as little as I dread it with la Belle Barbérie, thy services here will be useless!"

Seadrift coloured to the temples, crossed his arms meekly on his bosom, sunk in an attitude of leave-taking, that was so equivocal as to cause the attentive and critical young captain to smile, and then glided past him and disappeared through a hatchway.

The eye of Ludlow followed the active and graceful form while it continued in sight, and when it was no longer visible, he faced the Alderman, with a look which seemed to inquire how far he might be acquainted with the true character of the individual who had been the cause of so much pain to himself.

"Have I done well, Sir, in permitting a subject of Queen Anne to quit us at this emergency?" he demanded, observing that either the phlegm or the self-command of Myndert rendered him proof to scrutiny.

"The lad may be termed contraband of war," returned the Alderman, without moving a muscle; "an article that will command a better price in a quiet, than in a turbulent market

In short, Captain Cornelius Ludlow, this Master Seadrift will not answer thy purpose at all in a combat."

"And is this example of heroism to go any farther, or may I count on the assistance of Mr. Alderman Van Beverout? He has the reputation of a loyal citizen."

"As for loyalty," returned the Alderman, "so far as saying God bless the Queen, at city feasts, will go, none are more so. A wish is not an expensive return for the protection of her fleets and armies, and I wish her and you success against the enemy with all my heart. But I never admired the manner in which the States General were dispossessed of their territories on this continent, Master Ludlow, and therefore I pay the Stuarts little more than I owe them in law."

"Which is as much as to say that you will join the gay smuggler in administering consolation to one whose spirit places her above the need of such succour?"

"Not so fast, young gentleman. We mercantile men like to see offsetts in our books before they are balanced. Whatever may be my opinion of the reigning family, which I only utter to you in confidence, and not as coin that is to pass from one to another, my love for the Grand Monarque is still less. Louis is at loggerheads with the United Provinces, as well as with our gracious Queen, and I see no harm in opposing one of his cruisers, since they certainly annoy trade, and render returns for investments inconveniently uncertain. I have heard artillery in my time, having in my younger days led a band of city volunteers in many a march and countermarch around the bowling-green; and for the honour of the second ward of the good town of Manhattan, I am now ready to undertake to shew that all knowledge of the art has not entirely departed from me."

"That is a manly answer, and provided it be sustained by a corresponding countenance, there shall be no impertinent inquiry into mo-

tives. 'Tis the officer that makes the ship victorious, for when he sets a good example and understands his duty, there is little fear of the men. Choose your position among any of these guns, and we will make an effort to disappoint yon servants of Louis, whether we do it as Englishmen, or only as the allies of the seven provinces."

Myndert descended to the quarter-deck, and having deliberately deposited his coat on the capstern, replaced his wig by a handkerchief, tightened the buckle that did the office of suspenders, he squinted along the guns, with a certain air, that served to assure the spectators he had at least no dread of the recoil.

Alderman Van Beverout was a personage far too important not to be known, by most of those who frequented the goodly town of which he was a civic officer. His presence therefore among the men, not a few of whom were natives of the colony, had a salutary effect; some yielding to the sympathy which is natural to a

hearty and encouraging example, while it is possible there were a few that argued less of the danger, in consequence of the indifference of a man who, being so rich, had so many motives to take good care of his person. Be this as it might, the burgher was received by a cheer, which drew a short but pithy address from him, in which he exhorted his companions in arms to do their duty in a manner which should teach the Frenchmen the wisdom of leaving that coast in future free from annoyance, while he wisely abstained from all the common-place allusions to king and country, a subject to which he felt his inability to do proper justice.

"Let every man remember that cause for courage which may be most agreeable to his own habits and opinions," concluded this imitator of the Hannibals and Scipios of old; "for that is the surest and the briefest method of bringing his mind into an obstinate state. In my own case there is no want of motive, and

I dare say each one of you may find some sufficient reasoning for entering heart and hand into this battle. Protests and credit! what would become of the affairs of the best house in the colonies were its principal to be led a captive to Brest or l'Orient? It might derange the business of the whole city. I'll not offend your patriotism with such a supposition, but at once believe that your minds are resolved, like my own, to resist to the last, for this is an interest which is general, as all questions of a commercial nature become, through their influence on the happiness and prosperity of society."

Having terminated his address in so apposite and public-spirited a manner, the worthy burgher hemmed loudly, and resumed his accustomed silence, perfectly assured of his own applause. If the matter of Myndert's discourse wears too much the air of an undivided attention to his own interests, the reader will not forget

it is by this concentration of individuality, that most of the mercantile prosperity of the world is achieved. The seamen listened with admiration, for they understood no part of the appeal; and next to a statement which shall be so lucid as to induce every hearer to believe it is no more than a happy explanation of his own ideas, that which is unintelligible is apt to unite most suffrages in its favour.

"You see your enemy, and you know your work!" said the clear, deep, manly voice of Ludlow, who, as he passed among the people of the Coquette, spoke to them in that steady unwavering tone which in moments of danger goes to the heart. "I shall not pretend that we are as strong as I could wish; but the greater the necessity for a strong pull, the readier a true seamen will be to give it. There are no nails in that ensign. When I am dead, you may pull it down if you please; but long as I live, my men, there it shall fly!

And now, one cheer to shew your humour, and then let the rest of your noise come from the guns."

The crew complied with a full-mouthed and hearty hurrah!—Trysail assured a young, laughing, careless midshipman, who even at that moment could enjoy an uproar, that he had seldom heard a prettier piece of sea-eloquence than that which had just fallen from the captain, it being both "neat and gentlemanlike."

CHAPTER VI.

"Sir, it is
A charge too heavy for my strength; but yet
We'll strive to bear it for your worthy sake,
To the extreme edge of hazard."

All's well that ends well.

THE vessel which appeared so inopportunely for the safety of the ill-manned British cruiser, was, in truth, a ship that had roved from among the islands of the Carribean sea in quest of some such adventure as that which now presented itself. She was called la Belle Fontange, and her commander, a youth of two-and-twenty, was already well known in the salons of the Marais, and behind the walls of

the Rue Basse des Remparts, as one of the most gay and amiable of those who frequented the former, and one of the most spirited and skilful among the adventurers who sometimes trusted to their address in the latter. Rank and influence at Versailles, had procured for the young Chevalier Dumont de la Rocheforte a command to which he could lay no claim, either by his experience or his services. His mother, a near relative of one of the beauties of the court, had been commanded to use sea-bathing, as a preventive against the consequences of the bite of a rabid lap-dog. By way of a suitable episode to the long descriptions she was in the daily habit of writing to those whose knowledge of her new element was limited to the constant view of a few ponds and ditches teeming with carp, or an occasional glimpse of some of the turbid reaches of the Seine, she had vowed to devote her youngest child to Neptune! In due time, that is to say, while the poetic sentiment was at the access, the young chevalier was duly enrolled, and in a time that greatly anticipated all regu-

lar and judicious preferment, he was placed in command of the corvette in question, and sent to the Indies to gain glory for himself and his country.

The Chevalier Dumont de la Rocheforte was brave, but his courage was not the calm and silent self-possession of a seaman. Like himself, it was lively, buoyant, thoughtless, bustling, and full of animal feeling. He had all the pride of a gentleman, and, unfortunately for the duty which he had now for the first time to perform, one of its dictates taught him to despise that species of mechanical knowledge which it was, just at this moment, so important to the commander of la Fontange to possess. He could dance to admiration, did the honours of his cabin with faultless elegance, and had caused the death of an excellent mariner, who had accidently fallen overboard, by jumping into the sea to aid him, without knowing how to swim a stroke himself; a rashness that had diverted those exertions which might have saved the unfortunate sailor, from the assistance of the subordinate to the safety of

his superior. He wrote sonnets prettily, and had some ideas of the new philosophy which was just beginning to dawn upon the world, but the cordage of his ship and the lines of a mathematical problem, equally presented labyrinths he had never threaded.

It was perhaps fortunate for the safety of all in her, that la Belle Fontange possessed an inferior officer, in the person of a native of Boulogne-sur-Mer, who was quite competent to see that she kept the proper course, and that she displayed none of the top-gallants of her pride at unpropitious moments. The ship itself was scientifically and finely moulded, of a light and airy rig, and of established reputation for speed. If it was defective in any thing, it had the fault, in common with its commander, of a want of sufficient solidity to resist the vicissitudes and dangers of the turbulent element on which it was destined to act.

The vessels were now within a mile of each other. The breeze was steady, and sufficiently fresh for all the ordinary evolutions of a naval

combat, while the water was just quiet enough to permit the ships to be handled with confidence and accuracy. La Fontange was running with her head to the eastward, and, as she had the advantage of the wind, her tall tracery of spars leaned gently in the direction of her adversary. The Coquette was standing on the other tack, and necessarily inclined from her enemy. Both vessels were stripped to their top-sails, spankers, and jibs, though the lofty sails of the Frenchmen were fluttering in the breeze, like the graceful folds of some fanciful drapery. No human being was distinctly visible in either fabric, though dark clusters around each mast-head, showed that the ready top-men were prepared to discharge their duties, even in the confusion and dangers of the impending contest. Once or twice la Fontange inclined her head more in the direction of her adversary, and then sweeping up again to the wind, she stood on in stately beauty. The moment was near when the ships were about to cross each other at a point where a musket would readily send its messenger across

the water that lay between them. Ludlow, who closely watched each change of position, and every rise and fall of the breeze, went on the poop, and swept the horizon with his glass, for the last time, before his ship should be enveloped in smoke. To his surprise, he discovered a pyramid of canvass rising above the sea in the direction of the wind. The sail was clearly visible to the naked eye, and had only escaped earlier observation in the duties of so urgent a moment. Calling the master to his side, he inquired his opinion concerning the character of the second stranger. But Trysail confessed it exceeded even his long tried powers of observation to say more than that it was a ship running before the wind, with a cloud of sail spread. After a second and a longer look, however, the experienced master ventured to add that the stranger had the squareness and symmetry of a cruiser, but of what size he would not yet presume to declare.

"It may be a light ship under her top-gallant and studding sails, or it may be, that we see only the lofty duck of some heavier vessel,

Captain Ludlow;—ha! he has caught the eye of the Frenchman, for the corvette has signals abroad!"

"To your glass. If the stranger answer we have no choice but our speed."

There was another keen and anxious examination of the upper spars of the distant ship, but the direction of the wind prevented any signs of her communicating with the corvette, from being visible. La Fontange appeared equally uncertain of the character of the stranger, and for a moment there was some evidence of an intention to change her course. But the moment for indecision had past. The ships were already sweeping up abreast of each other under the constant pressure of the breeze.

"Be ready men!" said Ludlow, in a low, but firm voice, retaining his elevated post on the poop, while he motioned to his companion to return to the main deck. "Fire at his flash!"

Intense expectation succeeded. The two graceful fabrics sailed steadily on, and came within hail. So profound was the stillness in

the Coquette, that the rushing sound of the water she heaped under her bows, was distinctly audible to all on board, and might be likened to the deep breathing of some vast animal, that was collecting its physical energies for some unusual exertion. On the other hand, tongues were loud and clamorous among the cordage of la Fontange. Just as the ships were fairly abeam, the voice of young Dumont was heard, shouting through a trumpet for his men to fire. Ludlow smiled in a seaman's scorn. Raising his own trumpet, with a quiet gesture to his attentive and ready crew, the whole discharge of their artillery broke out of the dark side of the ship, as if it had been by the volition of the fabric. The answering broadside was received almost as soon as their own had been given, and the two vessels passed swiftly without the line of shot.

The wind had sent back their own smoke upon the English, and for a time it floated on their decks, wreathed itself in the eddies of the sails, and passed away to leeward, with the breeze that succeeded to the counter-cur-

rent of the explosions. The whistling of shot and the crash of wood had been heard amid the din of the combat. Giving a glance at his enemy, who still stood on, Ludlow leaned from the poop, and with all a sailor's anxiety, he endeavoured to scan the gear aloft.

"What is gone, Sir?" he asked of Trysail, whose earnest face just then became visible through the drifting smoke. "What sail is so heavily flapping?"

"Little harm done, Sir—little harm. Bear a hand with the tackle on that fore-yard-arm, you lubbers! you move like snails in a minuet! The fellow has shot away the lee fore-top-sail-sheet, Sir; but we shall soon get our wings spread again. Lash it down, boys, as if it were butt-bolted;—so; steady out your bow-line, forward! Meet her, you can; meet her, you may—meet her!"

The smoke had disappeared, and the eye of the captain rapidly scanned the whole of his ship. Three or four top-men had already caught the flapping canvass, and were seated on the extremity of the fore-yard, busied in

securing their prize. A hole or two was visible in the other sails, and here and there an unimportant rope was dangling in a manner to shew that it had been cut by shot. Further than this, the damage aloft was not of a nature to attract his attention.

There was a different scene on deck. The feeble crew were earnestly occupied in loading the guns, and rammers and sponges were handled with all the intentness which men would manifest in a moment so exciting. The Alderman was never more absorbed in his ledger than he now appeared in his duty of a cannoneer, and the youths to whom the command of the batteries had necessarily been confided, diligently aided him with their greater authority and experience. Trysail stood near the capstan, coolly giving the orders which have been related, and gazing upward, with an interest so absorbed as to render him unconscious of all that passed around his person. Ludlow saw with pain that blood discoloured the deck at his feet, and that a seaman lay dead within reach of his arm. The rent plank and

shattered ceiling showed the spot where the destructive missile had entered.

Compressing his lips, like a man resolved, the commander of the Coquette bent further forward, and glanced at the wheel. The quarter-master, who held the spokes, was erect, steady, and kept his eye on the leech of the head-sail as unerringly as the needle points to the pole.

These were the observations of a single minute. The different circumstances related had been ascertained with so many rapid glances of the eye, and they had even been noted without losing for a moment the knowledge of the precise situation of la Fontange. The latter was already in stays. It became necessary to meet the evolution by another as prompt.

The order was no sooner given, than the Coquette, as if conscious of the hazard she ran of being raked, whirled away from the wind, and by the time her adversary was ready to deliver her other broadside, she was in a position to receive and to return it. Again the

ships approached each other, and once more they exchanged their streams of fire when abeam.

Ludlow now saw, through the smoke, the ponderous yard of la Fontange swinging heavily against the breeze, and the main-top-sail come flapping against her mast. Swinging off from the poop, by a backstay that had been shot away a moment before, he alighted on the quarter-deck by the side of the master.

"Touch all the braces!" he said, hastily, but still speaking low and clearly; "give a drag upon the bowlines—luff, Sir, luff; jam the ship up hard against the wind!"

The clear, steady answer of the quarter-master, and the manner in which the Coquette, still vomiting her sheets of flame, inclined towards the breeze, announced the promptitude of the subordinates. In another minute the vast volumes of smoke which enveloped the two ships joined, and formed one white and troubled cloud, which was rolling swiftly before the explosions over the surface of the sea, but which, as it rose higher in the air, sailed gracefully to leeward.

Our young commander passed swiftly through the batteries, spoke encouragingly to his people, and resumed his post on the poop. The stationary position of la Fontange, and his own efforts to get to windward, were already proving advantageous to Queen Anne's cruiser. There was some indecision on the part of the other ship, which instantly caught the eye of one whose readiness in his profession so much resembled instinct.

The Chevalier Dumont had amused his leisure by running his eyes over the records of the naval history of his country, where he had found this and that commander applauded for throwing their topsails to the mast, abreast of their enemies. Ignorant of the difference between a ship in line, and one engaged singly, he had determined to prove himself equal to a similar display of spirit. At the moment when Ludlow was standing alone on his poop, watching with vigilant eyes the progress of his own vessel and the position of his enemy, indicating merely by a look or a gesture, to the attentive Trysail beneath, what he wished done, there

was actually a wordy discussion, on the quarter-deck of the latter, between the mariner of Boulogne-sur-Mer and the gay favourite of the salons. They debated on the expediency of the step which the latter had taken, to prove the existence of a quality that no one doubted. The time lost in this difference of opinion was of the last importance to the British cruiser. Standing gallantly on, she was soon out of the range of her adversary's fire; and before the Boulognois had succeeded in convincing his superior of his error, their antagonist was on the other tack, and luffing across the wake of la Fontagne. The topsail was then tardily filled, but before the latter ship had recovered her motion, the sails of her enemy overshadowed her deck. There was now every prospect of the Coquette passing to windward. At that critical moment, the fair-setting topsail of the British cruiser was nearly rent in two by a shot. The ship fell off, the yards interlocked, and the vessels were foul.

The Coquette had all the advantage of position. Perceiving the important fact at a glance, Lud-

low made sure of its continuance, by throwing his grapnels. When the two ships were thus firmly lashed together, the young Dumont found himself relieved from a mountain of embarrassment. Sufficiently justified by the fact that not a single gun of his own would bear, while a murderous discharge of grape had just swept along his decks, he issued the order to board. But Ludlow, with his weakened crew, had not decided on so hazardous an evolution as that which brought him in absolute contact with his enemy, without foreseeing the means of avoiding all the consequences. The vessels touched each other only at one point, and this spot was protected by a row of muskets. No sooner, therefore, did the impetuous young Frenchman appear on the taffrail of his own ship, supported by a band of followers, than a close and deadly fire swept them away to a man. Young Dumont alone remained. For a single moment, his eye glared wildly, but the active frame, still obedient to the governing impulse of so impetuous a spirit, leaped onward. He fell without life on the deck of his enemy.

Ludlow watched every movement with a calmness that neither personal responsibility, nor the uproar and rapid incidents of the terrible scene, could discompose.

"Now is our time to bring the matter hand to hand!" he cried, making a gesture to Trysail to descend from the ladder, in order that he might pass.

His arm was arrested, and the grave old master pointed to windward.

"There is no mistaking the cut of those sails, or the lofty rise of those spars! The stranger is another Frenchman!"

One glance told Ludlow that his subordinate was right; another sufficed to shew what was now necessary.

"Cast loose the forward grapnel—cut it—away with it, clear!" was shouted through his trumpet, in a voice that rose commanding and clear amid the roar of the combat.

Released forward, the stern of the Coquette yielded to the pressure of her enemy, whose sails were all drawing, and she was soon in a position to enable her head-yards to be braced

sharp aback, in a direction opposite to the one in which she had so lately lain. The whole broadside was then delivered into the stern of la Fontagne, the last grapnel was released, and the ships separated.

The single spirit which presided over the evolutions and exertions of the Coquette still governed her movements. The sails were trimmed, the ship was got in command, and before the vessels had been asunder five minutes, the duty of the vessel was in its ordinary active and noiseless train.

Nimble top-men were on the yards, and broad folds of fresh canvass were flapping in the breeze, as the new sails were bent and set. Ropes were spliced, or supplied by new rigging, the spars examined, and, in fine, all that watchfulness and sedulous care was observed which is so necessary to the efficiency and safety of a ship. Every spar was secured, the pumps were sounded, and the vessel held on her way as steadily as if she had never fired nor received a shot.

On the other hand, la Fontagne betrayed the indecision and confusion of a worsted ship.

Her torn canvass was blowing about in disorder, many important ropes beat against her masts unheeded, and the vessel itself drove before the breeze in the helplessness of a wreck. For several minutes there seemed no controlling mind in the fabric; and when, after so much distance was lost as to give her enemy all the advantage of the wind, a tardy attempt was made to bring the ship up again, the tallest and most important of her masts was seen tottering, until it finally fell, with all its hamper, into the sea.

Notwithstanding the absence of so many of his people, success would now have been certain, had not the presence of the stranger compelled Ludlow to abandon his advantage. But the consequences to his own vessel were too sure, to allow of more than a natural and manly regret that so favourable an occasion should escape him. The character of the stranger could no longer be mistaken. The eye of every seaman in the Coquette as well understood the country of the high and narrow-headed sails, the tall taper masts and short yards of the frigate, whose hull was now distinctly visible,

as a landsman recognizes an individual by the distinguishing marks of his features or attire. Had there been any lingering doubts on the subject, they would have all given place to certainty, when the stranger was seen exchanging signals with the crippled corvette.

It was now time for Ludlow to come to a speedy determination on his future course. The breeze still held to the southward, but it was beginning to lessen, with every appearance that it would fail before night-fall. The land lay a few leagues to the northward, and the whole horizon of the ocean, with the exception of the two French cruisers, was clear. Descending to the quarter-deck, he approached the master, who was seated in a chair, while the surgeon dressed a severe hurt in one of his legs. Shaking the sturdy veteran cordially by the hand, he expressed his acknowledgments for his support in a moment so trying.

"God bless you! God bless you, Captain Ludlow!" returned the old sailor, dashing his hand equivocally across his weather-beaten brow. "Battle is certainly the place to try both ship

and friends; and, Heaven be praised, Queen Anne has not failed of either this day! No man has forgotten his duty, so far as my eyes have witnessed; and this is saying no trifle, with half a crew and an equal enemy. As for the ship, she never behaved better! I had my misgivings, when I saw the new main-top-sail go, which it did, as all here know, like a bit of rent muslin between the fingers of a seamstress. Run forward, Mr. Hopper, and tell the men in the fore-rigging to take another drag on that swifter, and to be careful and bring the strain equal on all the shrouds.—A lively youth, Captain Ludlow, and one who only wants a little reflection, with some more experience, and a small dash of modesty, together with the seamanship he will naturally get in time, to make a very tolerable officer."

"The boy promises well. But I have come to ask thy advice, my old friend, concerning our next movements. There is no doubt that the fellow who is coming down upon us is both a Frenchman and a frigate."

"A man might as well doubt the nature of a

fish-hawk, which is to pick up all the small fry, and let the big ones go. We might shew him our canvass, and try the open sea, but I fear that foremast is too weak, with three such holes in it, to bear the sail we should need!"

"What think you of the wind?" said Ludlow, affecting an indecision he did not feel, in order to soothe the feelings of his wounded companion. "Should it hold, we might double Montauk, and return for the rest of our people; but should it fail, is there no danger that the frigate should tow within shot?—We have no boats to escape her!"

"The soundings on this coast are as regular as the roof of an out-house," said the master, after a moment of thought; "and it is my advice, if it is your pleasure to ask it, Captain Ludlow, that we shoal our water as much as possible, while the wind lasts. Then I think we shall be safe from a very near visit from the big one; as for the corvette, I am of opinion that, like a man who has eaten his dinner, she has no stomach for another slice."

Ludlow applauded the advice of his subor-

dinate, for it was precisely what he had determined on doing, and after again complimenting him on his coolness and skill, he issued the necessary orders. The helm of the Coquette was now placed hard a-weather, the yards were squared, and the ship was put before the wind. After running in this direction for a few hours, the wind gradually lessening, the lead announced that the keel was quite as near the bottom as the time of the tide and the dull heaving and setting of the element rendered at all prudent. The breeze soon after fell, and then our young commander ordered an anchor to be dropped into the sea.

His example, in the latter respect, was imitated by the hostile cruisers. They had soon joined, and boats were seen passing from one to the other so long as there was light. When the sun fell behind the western margin of the ocean, their dusky outlines, distant about a league, gradually grew less and less distinct, until the darkness of night enveloped sea and land in its gloom.

CHAPTER VII.

"— Now;—the business!"

Othello.

THREE hours later, and every noise was hushed on board the royal cruiser. The toil of repairing damages had ceased, and most of the living, with the dead, lay alike in common silence. The watchfulness necessary to the situation of the fatigued mariners, however, was not forgotten; and though so many slept, a few eyes were still open, and affecting to be alert. Here and there some drowsy seaman paced the deck, or a solitary young officer endeavoured to keep

himself awake by humming a low air in his narrow bounds. The mass of the crew slept heavily, with pistols in their belts and cutlasses at their sides, between the guns. There was one figure extended upon the quarter-deck, with the head resting on a shot-box. The deep breathing of this person denoted the unquiet slumbers of a powerful frame, in which weariness contended with suffering. It was the wounded and feverish master, who had placed himself in that position to catch an hour of the repose that was necessary to his situation. On an arm-chest, which had been emptied of its contents, lay another, but a motionless human form, with the limbs composed in decent order, and with the face turned towards the melancholy stars. This was the body of the young Dumont, which had been kept with the intention of consigning it to consecrated earth when the ship should return to port. Ludlow, with the delicacy of a generous and chivalrous enemy, had with his own hands spread the stainless ensign of his country over the remains of the inexperienced but gallant young Frenchman.

There was one little group, on the raised deck in the stern of the vessel, in which the ordinary interests of life still seemed to exercise their influence. Hither Ludlow had led Alida and her companions, after the duties of the day were over, in order that they might breathe an air fresher than that of the interior of the vessel. The negress nodded near her young mistress, the tired Alderman sate with his back supported against the mizen-mast, giving audible evidence of his situation, and Ludlow stood erect, occasionally throwing an earnest look on the surrounding and unruffled waters, and then lending his attention to the discourse of his companions. Alida and Seadrift were seated near each other on chairs. The conversation was low, while the melancholy and the tremor in the voice of la Belle Barbérie, denoted how much the events of the day had shaken her usually firm and spirited mind.

"There is a mingling of the terrific and the beautiful, of the grand and the seducing in this unquiet profession of yours!" observed,

or rather continued Alida, replying to a previous remark of the young sailor. "That tranquil sea—the hollow sound of the surf on the shore—and this soft canopy above us, form objects on which even a girl might dwell in admiration, were not her ears still ringing with the roar and cries of the combat. Did you say the commander of the Frenchman was but a youth?"

"A mere boy in appearance, and one who doubtless owed his rank to the advantages of birth and family. We know it to be the captain by his dress, no less than by the desperate effort he made to recover the false step taken in the earlier part of the action."

"Perhaps he has a mother, Ludlow!—a sister—a wife—or—"

Alida paused, for, with maiden diffidence, she hesitated to pronounce the tie which was uppermost in her thoughts.

"He may have had one, or all! Such are the sailor's hazards, and—"

"Such the hazards of those who feel an

interest in their safety!" uttered the low but expressive voice of Seadrift.

A deep and eloquent silence succeeded. Then the voice of Myndert was heard muttering, indistinctly, "Twenty of beaver, and three of marten—as per invoice." The smile, which spite of the train of his thoughts, rose on the lips of Ludlow, had scarcely passed away, when the hoarse tones of Trysail, rendered still hoarser by his sleep, were plainly heard in a stifled cry, saying, "Bear a hand there with your stoppers!—the Frenchman is coming round upon us again!"

"That is prophetic!" said one aloud, behind the listening group. Ludlow turned, quick as the flag fluttering on its vane, and through the darkness he recognised, in the motionless but manly form that stood near him on the poop, the fine person of the Skimmer of the Seas.

"Call away—!"

"Call none!"—interrupted Tiller, stopping the hurried order which involuntarily broke

out of the lips of Ludlow. "Let thy ship feign the silence of a wreck, but in truth let there be watchfulness and preparation even to her store-rooms! You have done well, Captain Ludlow, to be on the alert, though I have known sharper eyes than those of some of your look-outs."

"Whence come you, audacious man, and what mad errand has brought you again on the deck of my ship?"

"I come from my habitation on the sea. My business here, is warning!"

"The sea!" echoed Ludlow, gazing about him at the narrow and empty view. "The hour for mockery is past, and you would do well to trifle no more with those who have serious duties to discharge."

"The hour is indeed one for serious duties —duties more serious than any you apprehend. But before I enter on explanation, there must be conditions between us. You have one of the sea-green lady's servitors here; I claim his liberty for my secret."

"The error into which I had fallen exists

no longer," returned Ludlow, looking for an instant towards the shrinking form of Seadrift. "My conquest is worthless, unless you come to supply his place."

"I come for other purposes—here is one who knows I do not trifle when urgent affairs are on hand. Let thy companions retire, that I may speak openly."

Ludlow hesitated, for he had not yet recovered from the surprise of finding the redoubtable free-trader so unexpectedly on the deck of his ship. But Alida and her companion arose, like those who had more confidence in their visitor, and arousing the negress from her sleep, they descended the ladder and entered the cabin. When Ludlow found himself alone with Tiller, he demanded an explanation.

"It shall not be withheld, for time presses, and that which is to be done, must be done with a seaman's care and coolness," returned the other.—"You have had a close brush with one of Louis's rovers, Captain Ludlow, and prettily was the ship of Queen Anne handled!

Have your people suffered, and are you still strong enough to make good a defence worthy of your conduct this morning?"

"These are facts you would have me utter to the ear of one who may be false—even a spy!"

"Captain Ludlow—but circumstances warrant thy suspicions!"

"One whose vessel and life I have threatened—an outlaw!"

"This is too true," returned the Skimmer of the Seas, suppressing a sudden impulse of pride and resentment. "I am threatened and pursued—I am a smuggler and an outlaw: still am I human! You see that dusky object which borders the sea to the northward?"

"It is too plainly land, to be mistaken."

"Land, and the land of my birth!—the earliest, perhaps I may say the happiest of my days, were passed on that long and narrow island."

"Had I known it earlier, there would have been a closer look among its bays and inlets."

"The search might have been rewarded. A cannon would easily throw its shot from this deck, to the spot where my brigantine now lies snug at a single anchor."

"Unless you have swept her near since the setting of the sun, that is impossible! When the night drew on, nothing was in view but the frigate and corvette of the enemy."

"We have not stirred a fathom, and yet, true as the word of a fearless man, there lies the vessel of the sea-green lady. You see the place where the beach falls, here, at the nearest point of the land?—the island is nearly severed by the water, at that spot, and the Water Witch is safe in the depths of the bay which enters from the northward. There is not a mile between us. From the eastern hill I witnessed your spirit this day, Captain Ludlow, and though condemned in person, I felt that the heart could never be outlawed. There is a fealty here, that can survive even the persecutions of the custom-houses!"

"You are happy in your terms, Sir. I will

not conceal that I think a seaman, even as skilful as yourself, must allow that the Coquette was kept prettily in command?"

"No pilot-boat could have been more sure or more lively. I knew your weakness, for the absence of all your boats was no secret to me; and I confess I could have spared some of the profits of the voyage to have been on your decks this day with a dozen of my truest fellows."

"A man who can feel this loyalty to the flag, should find a more honourable occupation for his usual life."

"A country that can inspire it, should be cautious not to estrange the affections of its children by monopolies and injustice. But these are discussions unsuited to the moment. I am doubly your countryman in this strait, and all the past is no more than the rough liberties which friends take with each other. Captain Ludlow, there is danger brooding in that dark void which lies to seaward."

"On what authority do you speak thus?"

"Sight! I have been among your enemies,

and have seen their deadly preparations. I know the caution is given to a brave man, and nothing shall be extenuated. You have need of all your resolution and of every arm, for they will be upon you in overwhelming numbers."

"True or false, thy warning shall not be neglected."

"Hold!" said the Skimmer, arresting a forward movement of his companion with his hand. "Let them sleep to the last moment. You have yet an hour, and rest will renew their strength. You may trust the experience of a seaman who has passed half of the life of man on the ocean, and who has witnessed all its most stirring scenes, from the conflict of the elements to every variety of strife that man has invented to destroy his fellows. For another hour you will be secure. After that hour, God protect the unprepared, and God be merciful to him whose minutes are numbered."

"Thy language and manner are those of one who deals honestly," returned Ludlow, struck

by the apparent sincerity of the free-trader's communication. "In every event, we shall be ready, though the manner of your having gained this knowledge, is as great a mystery as your appearance on the deck of my ship."

"Both can be explained," returned the Skimmer, motioning to his companion to follow to the taffrail. Here he pointed to a small and nearly imperceptible skiff, which floated at the bottom of a stern ladder, and continued; "One who so often pays secret visits to the land, can never be in want of the means. This nut-shell was easily transported across the narrow slip of land that separates the bay from the ocean, and though the surf moans so hoarsely, it is easily passed by a steady and dexterous oarsman. I have been under the martingale of the Frenchman, and you see that I am here. If your look-outs are less alert than usual, you will remember that a low gunwale, a dusky side, and a muffled oar, are not readily detected, when the eye is heavy and the body wearied. I must now quit you, unless you think it more prudent to send those

who can be of no service out of the ship before the trial shall come?"

Ludlow hesitated. A strong desire to put Alida in a place of safety, was met by his distrust of the smuggler's faith. He reflected a moment ere he answered.

"Your cockle-shell is not sufficiently secure for more than its owner. Go! and as you prove loyal may you prosper!"

"Abide the blow," said the Skimmer, grasping his hand. He then stepped carelessly on the dangling ropes and descended into the boat beneath. Ludlow watched his movements with an intense, and possibly with a distrustful curiosity. When seated at the sculls the person of the free-trader was nearly indistinct, and as the boat glided noiselessly away, the young commander no longer felt disposed to censure those who had permitted its approach without a warning. In less than a minute the dusky object was confounded with the surface of the sea.

Left to himself the young commander of the Coquette seriously reflected on what had passed.

The manner of the Skimmer, the voluntary character of his communication, its probability, and the means by which his knowledge had been obtained, united to confirm his truth. Instances of similar attachment to their flag, in seamen whose ordinary pursuits were opposed to its interests, were not uncommon. Their misdeeds resemble the errors of passion and temptation, while the momentary return to better things, is like the inextinguishable impulses of nature.

The admonition of the free-trader, who had enjoined the captain to allow his people to sleep, was remembered. Twenty times, within as many minutes, did our young sailor examine his watch to note the tardy passage of the time, and as often did he return it to his pocket with a determination to forbear. At length he descended to the quarter-deck, and drew near the only form that was erect. The watch was commanded by a youth of sixteen, whose regular period of probationary service had not passed, but who, in the absence of his superiors, was entrusted with this delicate

and important duty. He stood leaning against the capstan, one hand supporting his cheek, while the elbow rested against the drum, and the body was without motion. Ludlow regarded him a moment, and then lifting a lighted battle-lantern to his face he saw that he slept. Without disturbing the delinquent the captain replaced the lantern and passed forward. In the gangway there stood a marine with his musket shouldered, in an attitude of attention. As Ludlow brushed within a few inches of his eyes, it was easy to be seen that they opened and shut involuntarily, and without consciousness of what lay before them. On the top-gallant forecastle was a short, square, and well-balanced figure, that stood without support of any kind, with both arms thrust into the bosom of a jacket, and a head that turned slowly to the west and south, as if it were examining the ocean, in those directions.

Stepping lightly up the ladder, Ludlow saw that it was the veteran seaman who was rated as the captain of the forecastle.

" I am glad, at last, to find one pair of eyes

open, in my ship," said the captain. "Of the whole watch, you alone are alert."

"I have doubled cape fifty, your Honour, and the seaman who has made that voyage, rarely wants the second call of the boatswain. Young heads have young eyes, and sleep is next to food, after a heavy drag at gun-tackles and lanyards."

"And what draws your attention so steadily in that quarter? There is nothing visible but the haze of the sea."

"'Tis the direction of the Frenchman, Sir—does your Honour hear nothing?"

"Nothing," said Ludlow, after intently listening for half a minute. "Nothing, unless it be the wash of the surf on the beach."

"It may be only fancy, but there came a sound like the fall of an oar-blade on a thwart, and 'tis but natural, your Honour, to expect the Mounsheer will be out, in this smooth water, to see what has become of us. There went the flash of a light, or my name is not Bob Cleet!"

Ludlow was silent. A light was certainly visible in the quarter where the enemy was

known to be anchored, and it came and disappeared like a moving lantern. At length it was seen to descend slowly, and vanish as if it were extinguished in the water.

"That lantern went into a boat, Captain Ludlow, though a lubber carried it!" said the positive old forecastle-man, shaking his head, and beginning to pace across the deck with the air of a man who needed no further confirmation of his suspicions.

Ludlow returned towards the quarter-deck, thoughtful but calm. He passed among his sleeping crew, without awaking a man, and even forbearing to touch the still motionless midshipman, he entered his cabin, without speaking.

The commander of the Coquette was absent but a few minutes. When he again appeared on deck, there was more of decision and of preparation in his manner.

"'Tis time to call the watch, Mr. Reef," he whispered, at the elbow of the drowsy officer of the deck, without betraying his consciousness of the youth's forgetfulness of duty; "the glass is out,"

"Ay, ay, Sir.—Bear a-hand and turn the glass!" muttered the young man. "A fine night, Sir, and very smooth water.—I was just thinking of—"

"Home and thy mother! 'Tis the way with us all in youth. Well, we have now something else to occupy the thoughts. Muster all the gentlemen here on the quarter-deck, Sir."

When the half-sleeping midshipman quitted his captain to obey this order, the latter drew near the spot where Trysail still lay, in an unquiet sleep. A light touch of a single finger was sufficient to raise the master on his feet. The first look of the veteran tar was aloft, the second at the heavens, and the last at his captain.

"I fear thy wound stiffens, and that the night-air has added to the pain?" observed the latter, speaking in a kind and considerate tone.

"The wounded spar cannot be trusted like a sound stick, Captain Ludlow; but as I am no foot-soldier on a march, the duty of the ship may go on without my calling for a horse."

"I rejoice in thy cheerful spirit, my old

friend, for here is serious work likely to fall upon our hands. The Frenchmen are in their boats, and we shall shortly be brought to close quarters, or prognostics are false."

"Boats!" repeated the Master. "I had rather it were under our canvass, with a stiff breeze! The play of this ship is a lively foot, and a touching leech; but when it comes to boats, a marine is nearly as good a man as a quarter-master!"

"We must take fortune as it offers.—Here is our council! It is composed of young heads, but of hearts that might do credit to grey hairs."

Ludlow joined the little group of officers that was by this time assembled near the capstan. Here, in a few words, he explained the reason why he had summoned them from their sleep. When each of the youths understood his orders, and the nature of the new danger that threatened the ship, they separated, and began to enter with activity but in guarded silence, on the necessary preparations. The sound of footsteps awoke a dozen of the

older seamen, who immediately joined their officers.

Half an hour passed like a moment, in such an occupation. At the end of that time, Ludlow deemed his ship ready. The two forward guns had been run in, and the shot having been drawn, their places were supplied with double charges of grape and canister. Several swivels, a species of armament much used in that age, were loaded to the muzzles, and placed in situations to rake the deck, while the fore-top was plentifully stored with arms and ammunition. The matches were prepared, and then the whole of the crew was mustered, by a particular call of each man. Five minutes sufficed to issue the necessary orders, and to see each post occupied. After this the low hum ceased in the ship, and the silence again became so deep and general, that the wash of the receding surf was nearly as audible as the plunge of the wave on the sands.

Ludlow stood on the forecastle, accompanied by the master. Here he lent all his senses to the appearance of the elements, and to the signs

of the moment. Wind there was none, though occasionally a breath of hot air came from the land, like the first efforts of the night-breeze. The heavens were clouded, though a few thoughtful stars glimmered between the masses of vapour.

"A calmer night never shut in the Americas!" said the veteran Trysail, shaking his head doubtingly, and speaking in a suppressed and cautious tone. "I am one of those, Captain Ludlow, who think more than half the virtue is out of a ship, when her anchor is down!"

"With a weakened crew, it may be better for us that the people have no yards to handle, or any bowlines to steady. All our care can be given to defence."

"This is much like telling the hawk he can fight the better with a clipped wing, since he has not the trouble of flying! The nature of a ship is motion, and the merit of a seaman is judicious and lively handling;—but of what use is complaining, since it will neither lift an anchor, nor fill a sail! What is your opinion, Captain Ludlow, concerning an after life, and

of all those matters one occasionally hears of, if he happens to drift in the way of a church?"

"The question is broad as the ocean, my good friend, and a fitting answer might lead us into abstrusities deeper than any problem in our trigonometry.—Was that the stroke of an oar!"

"'Twas a land noise. Well, I am no great navigator among the crooked channels of religion. Every new argument is a sand-bar, or a shoal, that obliges me to tack and stand off again, else I might have been a bishop, for any thing the world knows to the contrary. 'Tis a gloomy night, Captain Ludlow, and one that is sparing of its stars. I never knew luck come of an expedition on which a natural light did not fall!"

"So much the worse for those who seek to harm us. I surely heard an oar in the row-lock!"

"It came from the shore, and had the sound of the land about it," quietly returned the master, who still kept his look riveted on the heavens. "This world in which we live, Cap-

tain Ludlow, is one of extraordinary uses; but that to which we are steering, is still more unaccountable. They say that worlds are sailing above us, like ships in a clear sea; and there are people who believe that when we take our departure from this planet, we are only bound to another, in which we are to be rated according to our own deeds here; which is much the same as being drafted for a new ship, with a certificate of service in one's pocket."

"The resemblance is perfect," returned the other, leaning far over a timber-head, to catch the smallest sound that might come from the ocean. "That was no more than the blowing of a porpoise!"

"It was strong enough for the puff of a whale. There is no scarcity of big fish on the coast of this island, and bold harpooners are the men who are scattered about on the sandy downs here-away to the northward. I once sailed with an officer who knew the name of every star in the heavens, and often have I passed hours in listening to his history of their

magnitude and character during the middle watches. It was his opinion that there is but one navigator for all the rovers of the air, whether meteors, comets, or planets."

"No doubt he must be right, having been there."

"No, that is more than I can say for him, though few men have gone deeper into the high latitudes, on both sides of our own equator, than he. One surely spoke! here, in a line with yonder low star!"

"Was it not a water-fowl?"

"No gull—ha! here we have the object just within the starboard jib-boom-guy. There comes the Frenchman in his pride, and 'twill be lucky for him who lives to count the slain or to boast of his deeds."

The master descended from the forecastle, and passed among the crew, with every thought recalled from its excursive flight to the duty of the moment. Ludlow continued on the forecastle alone. There was a low whispering sound in the ship, like that which is made by the mur-

muring of a rising breeze, and then all was still as death.

The Coquette lay with her head to seaward, the stern necessarily pointing towards the land. The distance from the latter was less than a mile, and the direction of the ship's hull was caused by the course of the heavy ground-swell, which incessantly rolled the waters on the wide beach of the island. The head-gear lay in the way of the dim view, and Ludlow walked out on the bowsprit, in order that nothing should lie between him and the part of the ocean he wished to study. Here he had not stood a minute, when he caught, first a confused, and then a more distinct glimpse of a line of dark objects advancing slowly towards the ship. Assured of the position of his enemy, he returned in-board, and descended among his people. In another moment he was again on the forecastle, across which he paced leisurely, and, to all appearance, with the calmness of one who enjoyed the refreshing coolness of the night.

At the distance of a hundred fathoms the dusky line of boats paused, and began to change

its order. At that instant the first puffs of the land breeze were felt, and the stern of the ship made a gentle inclination seaward.

"Help her with the mizzen! Let fall the top-sail!" whispered the young captain to those beneath him. Ere another moment the flap of the loosened sail was heard. The ship swung still further, and Ludlow stamped on the deck.

A round fiery light shot beyond the martingale, and the smoke rolled along the sea, outstripped by a crowd of missiles that were hissing across the water. A shout, in which command was mingled with shrieks followed, and then oar-blades were heard dashing the water aside regardless of concealment. The ocean lighted, and three or four boat-guns returned the fatal discharge from the ship. Ludlow had not spoken. Still alone, on his elevated and exposed post, he watched the effects of both fires with a commander's coolness. The smile that struggled about his compressed mouth, when the momentary confusion among the boats betrayed the success of his own attack, had been wild and exulting, but when he heard the rend-

ing of the plank beneath him, the heavy groans that succeeded, and the rattling of lighter objects that were scattered by the shot, as it passed with lessened force along the deck of his ship, it became fierce and resentful.

"Let them have it!" he shouted, in a clear animating voice, that assured the people of his presence and his care. "Show them the humour of an Englishman's sleep, my lads! Speak to them, tops and decks."

The order was obeyed. The remaining bow-gun was fired, and the discharge of all the Coquette's musketry and blunderbusses followed. A crowd of boats came sweeping under the bowsprit of the ship at the same moment, and then arose the clamour and shouts of the boarders.

The succeeding minutes were full of confusion and of devoted exertion. Twice were the head and bowsprit of the ship filled with dark groups of men, whose grim visages were only visible by the pistol's flash, and as often were they cleared by the pike and bayonet. A third effort was more successful, and the

tread of the assailants was heard on the deck of the forecastle. The struggle was but momentary, though many fell, and the narrow arena was soon slippery with blood. The Boulognese mariner was foremost among his countrymen, and at that desperate emergency, Ludlow and Trysail fought in the common herd. Numbers prevailed, and it was fortunate for the commander of the Coquette that the sudden recoil of a human body, that fell upon him, drove him from his footing to the deck beneath.

Recovering from the fall, the young captain cheered his men by his voice, and was answered by the deep-mouthed shouts which an excited seaman is ever ready to deliver even to the death.

"Rally in the gangways and defy them!" was the animated cry. "Rally in the gangways, hearts of oak!" was returned by Trysail, in a ready but weakened voice. The men obeyed, and Ludlow saw that he could still muster a force capable of resistance.

Both parties for a moment paused. The fire

of the top annoyed the boarders, and the defendants hesitated to advance. But the rush from both was common, and a fierce encounter occurred at the foot of the foremast. The crowd thickened in the rear of the French, and one of their numbers no sooner fell than another filled his place. The English receded, and Ludlow, extricating himself from the mass, retired to the quarter-deck.

"Give way, men!" he again shouted, so clear and steady, as to be heard above the cries and execrations of the fight. "Into the wings —down—between the guns—down—to your covers!"

The English disappeared as if by magic. Some leaped upon the ridge-ropes, others sought the protection of the guns, and many went through the hatches. At that moment Ludlow made his most desperate effort. Aided by the gunner, he applied matches to the two swivels which had been placed in readiness for a last resort. The deck was enveloped in smoke, and when the vapour lifted, the forward part of the

ship was as clear as if man had never trod it. All who had not fallen had vanished.

A shout and a loud hurrah brought back the defendants, and Ludlow headed a charge upon the top-gallant-forecastle again in person. A few of the assailants showed themselves from behind covers on the deck, and the struggle was renewed. Glaring balls of fire sailed over the heads of the combatants, and fell among the throng in the rear. Ludlow saw the danger, and he endeavoured to urge his people on to regain the bow-guns, one of which was known to be loaded. But the explosion of a grenade on deck and in his rear, was followed by a shock in the hold that threatened to force the bottom out of the vessel. The alarmed and weakened crew began to waver, and as a fresh attack of grenades was followed by a fierce rally, in which the assailants brought up fifty men in a body from their boats, Ludlow found himself compelled to retire amid the retreating mass of his own crew.

The defence now assumed the character of

hopeless but desperate resistance. The cries of the enemy were more and more clamorous, and they succeeded in nearly silencing the top by a heavy fire of musketry established on the bow-sprit and sprit-sail-yard.

Events passed much faster than they can be related. The enemy were in possession of all the forward part of the ship to her fore hatches; but into these young Hopper had thrown himself with half a dozen men, and, aided by a brother midshipman in the launch, backed by a few followers, they still held the assailants at bay. Ludlow cast an eye behind him, and began to think of selling his life as dearly as possible in the cabins. That glance was arrested by the sight of the malign smile of the sea-green lady, as the gleaming face rose above the taffrail. A dozen dark forms leaped upon the poop, and then arose a voice that sent every tone it uttered to his heart.

"Abide the shock!" was the shout of those who came to the succour, and "abide the shock," was echoed by the crew. The mysterious image glided along the deck, and Ludlow knew the

athletic frame that brushed through the throng at its side.

There was little noise in the onset, save the groans of the sufferers. It endured but a moment, but it was a moment that resembled the passage of a whirlwind. The defendants knew that they were succoured, and the assailants recoiled before so unexpected a foe. The few that were caught beneath the forecastle were mercilessly slain, and those above were swept from their post like chaff drifting in a gale. The living and the dead were heard falling alike into the sea, and in an inconceivably short space of time the decks of the Coquette were free. A solitary enemy still hesitated on the bowsprit. A powerful and active frame leaped along the spar, and though the blow was not seen, its effects were visible, as the victim tumbled helplessly into the ocean.

The hurried dash of oars followed, and before the defendants had time to assure themselves of the completeness of their success, the gloomy void of the surrounding ocean had swallowed up the boats.

CHAPTER VIII.

"That face of his I do remember well;
Yet when I saw it last it was besmeared
As black as Vulcan, in the smoke of war."

What you will.

From the moment when the Coquette fired her first gun, to the moment when the retiring boats became invisible, was just twenty minutes. Of this time, less than half had been occupied by the incidents related in the ship. Short as it was, in truth, it seemed to all engaged but an instant. The alarm was over, the sound of the oars had ceased, and still the survivors stood at their posts, as if expecting the attack to be

renewed. Then came those personal thoughts, which had been suspended in the fearful exigency of such a struggle. The wounded began to feel their pain, and to be sensible of the danger of their injuries, while the few who had escaped unhurt, turned a friendly care on their shipmates. Ludlow, as often happens with the bravest and most exposed, had escaped without a scratch; but he saw by the drooping forms around him, which were no longer sustained by the excitement of battle, that his triumph was dearly purchased.

"Send Mr. Trysail to me," he said, in a tone that had little of a victor's exultation. "The land breeze has made, and we will endeavour to improve it, and get inside the cape, lest the morning light give us more of these Frenchmen."

The order for "Mr. Trysail!" "the captain calls the master!" passed in a low call from mouth to mouth, but it was unanswered. A seaman told the expecting young commander that the surgeon desired his presence forward. A gleaming of lights, and a little group at the

foot of the foremast, was a beacon not to be mistaken. The weather-beaten master was in the agony, and his medical attendant had just risen from a fruitless examination of his wounds as Ludlow approached.

"I hope the hurt is not serious?" hurriedly whispered the alarmed young sailor to the surgeon, who was coolly collecting his implements, in order to administer to some more promising subject. "Neglect nothing that your art can suggest."

"The case is desperate, Captain Ludlow," returned the phlegmatic surgeon; "but if you have a taste for such things, there is as beautiful a case for amputation promised in the fore-topman, whom I have had sent below, as offers once in a whole life of active practice!"

"Go, go," interrupted Ludlow, half pushing the unmoved man of blood away, as he spoke; "go then, where your services are needed."

The other cast a glance around him, reproved his attendant in a sharp tone for unnecessarily exposing the blade of some ferocious

looking instrument to the dew, and departed.

"Would to God that some portion of these injuries had befallen those who are younger and stronger!" murmured the captain, as he leaned over the dying master. "Can I do aught to relieve thy mind, my old and worthy shipmate?"

"I have had my misgivings since we have dealt with witchcraft!" returned Trysail, whose voice the rattling of the throat had already nearly silenced. "I have had misgivings—but no matter. Take care of the ship—I have been thinking of our people—you'll have to cut—they can never lift the anchor—the wind is here at north."

"All this is ordered. Trouble thyself no further about the vessel; she shall be taken care of, I promise you. Speak of thy wife, and of thy wishes in England."

"God bless Mrs. Trysail! She'll get a pension, and I hope contentment! You must give the reef a good berth in rounding Montauk—and you'll naturally wish to find the anchors

again, when the coast is clear—if you can find it in your conscience, say a good word of poor old Ben Trysail in the despatches—".

The voice of the master sunk to a whisper, and became inaudible. Ludlow thought he strove to speak again, and he bent his ear to his mouth.

"I say—the weather-main-swifter and both back-stays are—gone;—look to the spars, for —for—there are—sometimes—heavy puffs at night—in the Americas!"

The last heavy respiration succeeded, after which came the long silence of death. The body was removed to the poop, and Ludlow, with a saddened heart, turned to duties that this accident rendered still more imperative.

Notwithstanding the heavy loss, and the originally weakened state of her crew, the sails of the Coquette were soon spread, and the ship moved away in silence, as if sorrowing for those who had fallen at her anchorage. When the vessel was fairly in motion, her captain ascended to the poop, in order to command a clearer view of all around him, as well as to profit by the situation to arrange his plans for the future.

He found he had been anticipated by the free-trader.

"I owe my ship—I may say my life, since in such a conflict they would have gone together—to thy succour!" said the young commander, as he approached the motionless form of the smuggler. "Without it, Queen Anne would have lost a cruiser, and the flag of England a portion of its well-earned glory."

"May thy royal mistress prove as ready to remember her friends in emergencies, as mine. In good truth, there was little time to lose, and trust me, we well understood the extremity. If we were tardy, it was because whale-boats were to be brought from a distance, for the land lies between my brigantine and the sea."

"He who came so opportunely, and acted so well, needs no apology."

"Captain Ludlow, are we friends?"

"It cannot be otherwise. All minor considerations must be lost in such a service. If it is your intention to push this illegal trade further on the coast, I must seek another station."

"Not so. Remain and do credit to your flag

and the land of your birth. I have long thought that this is the last time the keel of the Water Witch will ever plough the American seas. Before I quit you, I would have an interview with the merchant. A worse man might have fallen, and just now, even a better man might be spared. I hope no harm has come to him?"

"He has shown the steadiness of his Holland lineage to-day. During the boarding he was useful and cool."

"It is well. Let the Alderman be summoned to the deck, for my time is limited, and I have much to say."

The Skimmer paused, for at that moment a fierce light glared upon the ocean, the ship, and all in it. The two seamen gazed at each other in silence, and both recoiled, as men recede before an unexpected and fearful attack. But a bright and wavering light, which rose out of the forward hatch of the vessel, explained all. At the same moment, the deep stillness which, since the bustle of making sail, had ceased, per-

vaded the ship, was broken by the appalling cry of "Fire!"

The alarm which brings the blood in the swiftest current to a seaman's heart was now heard in the depths of the vessel. The smothered sounds below, the advancing uproar, and the rush on deck with the awful summons in the open air, succeeded each other with the rapidity of lightning. A dozen voices repeated the word "the grenade!" proclaiming, in a breath, both the danger and the cause. But an instant before, the swelling canvass, the dusky spars, and the faint lines of the cordage, were only to be traced by the glimmering light of the stars, and now the whole hamper of the ship was the more conspicuous, from the obscure back-ground against which it was drawn in distinct lines. The sight was fearfully beautiful: beautiful, for it showed the symmetry and fine outlines of the vessel's rig, resembling the effect of a group of statuary seen by torch-light; and fearful, since the dark void beyond seemed to declare their isolated and helpless state.

There was one breathless, eloquent moment, in which all were seen gazing at the grand spectacle in mute awe, and then a voice rose, clear, distinct and commanding, above the sullen sound of the torrent of fire which was roaring among the avenues of the ship.

"Call all hands to extinguish fire! Gentlemen, to your stations. Be cool, men; and be silent!"

There was a calmness and an authority in the tones of the young commander, that curbed the impetuous feelings of the startled crew. Accustomed to obedience, and trained to order, each man broke out of his trance and eagerly commenced the discharge of his allotted duty. At that instant an erect and unmoved form stood on the combings of the main hatch. A hand was raised in the air, and the call which came from the deep chest was like that of one used to speak in the tempest.

"Where are my brigantines?" it said, "Come away there, my sea-dogs! wet the light sails, and follow!"

A group of grave and submissive mariners

gathered about the Skimmer of the Seas, at the sound of his voice. Glancing an eye over them, as if to scan their quality and number, he smiled with a look in which high daring and practised self-command was blended with a constitutional gaîté de cœur.

"One deck or two," he added, "what avails a plank more or less in an explosion!—Follow!"

The free-trader and his people disappeared in the interior of the ship. An interval of great and resolute exertion succeeded. Blankets, sails, and every thing which offered, and which promised to be of use, were wetted and cast upon the flames. The engine was brought to bear, and the ship was deluged with water. But the confined space, with the heat and smoke, rendered it impossible to penetrate to those parts of the vessel where the conflagration raged. The ardour of the men abated, as hope lessened, and after half an hour of fruitless exertion, Ludlow saw with pain that his assistants began to yield to the inextinguishable principle of nature. The appearance of the

Skimmer on deck, followed by all his people, destroyed hope, and every effort ceased as suddenly as it had commenced.

"Think of your wounded," whispered the free-trader, with a steadiness no danger could disturb. "We stand on a raging volcano!"

"I have ordered the gunner to drown the magazine."

"He was too late. The hold of the ship is a fiery furnace. I heard him fall among the store-rooms, and it surpassed the power of man to give the wretch succour. The grenade has fallen near some combustibles, and painful as it is to part with a ship so loved, Ludlow, thou will meet the loss like a man!—Think of thy wounded; my boats are still hanging at the stern."

Ludlow reluctantly, but firmly, gave the order to bear the wounded to the boats. This was an arduous and delicate duty. The smallest boy in the ship knew the whole extent of the danger; and that a moment, by the explosion of the powder, might precipitate them all into eternity. The deck forward was getting too

hot to be endured, and there were places even in which the beams had given symptoms of yielding.

But the poop, elevated still above the fire, offered a momentary refuge. Thither all retired, while the weak and wounded were lowered with the caution circumstances would permit into the whale-boats of the smugglers.

Ludlow stood at one ladder and the free-trader at the other, in order to be certain that none proved recreant in so trying a moment. Near them were Alida, Seadrift, and the Alderman, with the attendants of the former.

It seemed an age before this humane and tender duty was performed. At length the cry of "all in!" was uttered in a manner to betray the extent of the self-command that had been necessary to effect it.

"Now, Alida, we may think of thee!" said Ludlow, turning to the spot occupied by the silent heiress

"And you?" she said, hesitating to move.

"Duty demands that I should be the last."

A sharp explosion beneath, and fragments of

fire flying upwards through a hatch, interrupted his words. Plunges into the sea, and a rush of the people to the boats, followed. All order and authority were completely lost in the instinct of life. In vain did Ludlow call on his men to be cool, and to await for those who were still above. His words were lost in the uproar of clamorous voices. For a moment it seemed, however, as if the Skimmer of the Seas would overcome the confusion. Throwing himself on a ladder, he glided into the bows of one of the boats, and holding by the ropes with a vigorous arm, he resisted the efforts of all the oars and boat-hooks, while he denounced destruction on him who dared to quit the ship. Had not the two crews been mingled, the high authority and determined mien of the free-booter would have prevailed, but while some were disposed to obey, others raised the cry of "Throw the dealer of witchcraft into the sea!" Boat-hooks were already pointed at his breast, and the horrors of the fearful moment were about to be increased by the violence of a mutinous contention, when a second explosion nerved the

arms of the rowers to madness. With a common and desperate effort they overcame all resistance. Swinging off upon the ladder, the furious seaman saw the boat glide from his grasp and depart. The execration that was uttered beneath the stern of the Coquette, was deep and powerful; but, in another moment, the Skimmer stood on the poop, calm and undejected, in the centre of the deserted group.

"The explosion of a few of the officers' pistols has frightened the miscreants," he said, cheerfully; "but hope is not yet lost: they linger in the distance, and may return!"

The sight of the helpless party on the poop, and the consciousness of being less exposed themselves, had indeed arrested the progress of the fugitives. Still selfishness predominated, and while most regretted their danger, none but the young and unheeded midshipmen, who were neither of an age nor of a rank to wield sufficient authority, proposed to return. There was little argument necessary to shew that the perils increased at each moment, and finding that no other expedient remained, the gallant

youths encouraged the men to pull towards the land; intending themselves to return instantly to the assistance of their commander and his friends. The oars dashed into the water again; and the retiring boats were soon lost to view in the body of darkness.

While the fire had been raging within, another element without had aided to lessen hope for those who were abandoned. The wind from the land had continued to rise, and, during the time lost in useless exertion, the ship had been permitted to run nearly before it. When hope was gone the helm had been deserted, and as all the lower sails had been hauled up to avoid the flames, the vessel had drifted many minutes nearly dead to leeward. The mistaken youths, who had not attended to these circumstances, were already miles from that beach they hoped to reach so soon; and ere the boats had separated from the ship five minutes, they were hopelessly asunder. Ludlow had early thought of the expedient of stranding the vessel, as the means of saving her people; but his better know-

ledge of their position soon shewed him the utter futility of the attempt.

Of the progress of the flames beneath, the mariners could only judge by circumstances. The Skimmer glanced his eye about him, on regaining the poop, and appeared to scan the amount and quality of the physical force that was still at their disposal. He saw that the Alderman, the faithful François, and two of his own seamen, with four of the petty officers of the ship, remained. The six latter, even in that moment of desperation, had calmly refused to desert their officers.

"The flames are in the state-rooms!" he whispered to Ludlow.

"Not further aft, I think, than the berths of the midshipmen, else we should hear more pistols."

"True—they are fearful signals to let us know the progress of the fire!—Our resource is a raft."

Ludlow looked as if he despaired of the means, but concealing the discouraging fear, he answered cheerfully in the affirmative. The

orders were instantly given, and all on board gave themselves to the task, heart and hand. The danger was one that admitted of no ordinary or half-conceived expedients, but, in such an emergency, it required all the readiness of their art, and even the greatness of that conception which is the property of genius. All distinctions of rank and authority had ceased, except as deference was paid to natural qualities, and the intelligence of experience. Under such circumstances the Skimmer of the Seas took the lead; and though Ludlow caught his ideas with professional quickness, it was the mind of the free-trader that controlled, throughout the succeeding exertions of that fearful night.

The cheek of Alida was blanched to a deadly paleness, but there rested about the bright and wild eyes of Seadrift an expression of supernatural resolution.

When the crew abandoned the hope of extinguishing the flames, they had closed all the hatches, to retard the crisis as much as possible. Here and there, however, little torch-

like lights were beginning to shew themselves through the planks, and the whole deck forward of the main-mast was already in a critical and sinking state. One or two of the beams had failed, but as yet the form of the construction was preserved. Still the seamen distrusted the treacherous footing, and had the heat permitted the experiment, they would have shrunk from a risk which, at any unexpected moment, might commit them to the fiery furnace beneath.

The smoke ceased, and a clear, powerful light illuminated the ship to her trucks. In consequence of the care and exertions of her people, the sails and masts were yet untouched, and as the graceful canvass swelled with the breeze, it still urged the blazing hull through the water.

The forms of the Skimmer and his assistants were visible in the midst of the gallant gear, perched on the giddy yards. Seen by that light, with his peculiar attire, his firm and certain step, and his resolute air, the free-trader resembled some fancied sea-god, who, secure

in his immortal immunities, had come to act his part in that awful but exciting trial of hardihood and skill. Seconded by the common men, he was employed in cutting the canvass from the yards. Sail after sail fell upon the deck, and in an incredibly short space of time the whole of the foremast was naked to its spars and rigging.

In the mean time Ludlow, assisted by the Alderman and François, had not been idle below. Passing forward, between the empty ridge-ropes, lanyard after lanyard parted under the blows of their little boarding-axes. The mast now depended on the strength of the wood and the support of a single back-stay.

"Lay down!" shouted Ludlow. "All is gone aft, but this stay!"

The Skimmer leaped upon the firm rope, followed by all aloft, and gliding downwards, he was instantly in the hammock-cloths. A crash followed their descent, and an explosion, which caused the whole of the burning fabric to tremble to its centre, seemed to announce the end of all. Even the free-trader recoiled

before the horrible din, but when he stood near Seadrift and the heiress again, there was cheerfulness in his tones, and a look of high, and even of gay resolution in his firm countenance.

"The deck has failed forwards," he said, "and our artillery is beginning to utter fearful signal guns! Be of cheer;—the magazine of a ship lies deep, and many sheathed bulk-heads still protect us."

Another discharge from a heated gun, however, proclaimed the rapid progress of the flames. The fire broke out of the interior anew, and the foremast-mast kindled.

"There must be an end of this!" said Alida, clasping her hands in a terror that could not be controlled. "Save yourselves, if possible, you who have strength and courage, and leave us to the mercy of Him whose eye is over all!"

"Go," added Seadrift, whose sex could no longer be concealed. "Human courage can do no more; leave us to die!"

The looks that were returned to these sad requests were melancholy, but unmoved. The

Skimmer caught a rope, and still holding it in his hand, he descended to the quarter-deck, on which he at first trusted his weight with jealous caution. Then looking up, he smiled encouragingly, and said,—"Where a gun still stands, there is no danger for the weight of a man!"

"It is our only resource," cried Ludlow, imitating his example. "On, my men, while the beams will still hold us."

In a moment all were on the quarter-deck, though the excessive heat rendered it impossible to remain stationary an instant. A gun on each side was run in, its tackles loosened, and its muzzle pointed towards the tottering, unsupported, but still upright foremast.

"Aim at the cleets," said Ludlow to the Skimmer, who pointed one gun, while he did the same office at the other.

"Hold!" cried the latter. "Throw in shot—it is but the chance between a bursting gun and a lighted magazine!"

Additional balls were introduced into each piece, and then, with steady hands, the gallant

mariners applied burning brands to the priming. The discharges were simultaneous, and for an instant volumes of smoke rolled along the deck, and seemed to triumph over the conflagration. The rending of wood was audible. It was followed by a sweeping noise in the air, and the fall of the foremast, with all its burden of spars, into the sea. The motion of the ship was instantly arrested, and, as the heavy timbers were still attached to the bowsprit by the forward stays, her head came to the wind, when the remaining topsails flapped, shivered, and took aback.

The vessel was now, for the first time during the fire, stationary. The common mariners profited by the circumstance, and darting past the mounting flame along the bulwarks, they gained the top-gallant-forecastle, which though heated was yet untouched. The Skimmer glanced an eye about him, and seizing Seadrift by the waist, as if the mimic seaman had been a child, he pushed forward between the ridge-ropes. Ludlow followed with Alida, and the others imitated their example in the best man-

ner they could. All reached the head of the ship in safety; though Ludlow had been driven by the flames into the fore-channels, and thence nearly into the sea.

The petty officers were already on the floating spars, separating them from each other, cutting away the unnecessary weight of rigging, bringing the several parts of the wood in parallel lines, and lashing them anew. Ever and anon, these rapid movements were quickened by one of those fearful signals from the officer's berths, which, by announcing the progress of the flames beneath, betrayed their increasing proximity to the still slumbering volcano. The boats had been gone an hour, and yet it seemed to all in the ship but a minute. The conflagration had, for the last ten minutes, advanced with renewed fury, and the whole of the confined flame, which had been so long pent in the depths of the vessel, now glared high in the open air.

"This heat can no longer be borne," said Ludlow; "we must to our raft for breath."

"To the raft then," returned the cheerful

voice of the free-trader. "Haul in upon your fasts, men, and stand by to receive the precious freight."

The seamen obeyed. Alida and her companions were lowered safely to the place prepared for their reception. The foremast had gone over the side, with all its spars aloft; for preparation had been made, before the fire commenced, to carry sail to the utmost, in order to escape the enemy. The skilful and active seamen, directed and aided by Ludlow and the Skimmer, had made a simple but happy disposition of those buoyant materials on which their all now depended. In settling in the water, the yards still crossed had happily fallen uppermost. The booms and all the light spars had been floated near the top, and laid across, reaching from the lower to the top-sail-yard. A few light spars, stowed outboard, had been cut away and added to the number, and the whole were secured with the readiness and ingenuity of seamen. On the first alarm of fire, some of the crew had seized a few articles that would float, and rushed to the head, as the place most remote

from the magazine, in the blind hope of saving life by swimming. Most of these articles had been deserted, when the people were rallied to exertion by their officers. A couple of empty shot-boxes and a mess-chest were among them, and on the latter were seated the females, while the former served to keep their feet from the water. As the arrangement of the spars forced the principal mast entirely beneath the element, and the ship was so small as to need little artificial work in her masting, the part around the top which contained the staging was scarcely submerged. Although a ton in weight was added to the inherent gravity of the wood, still, as the latter was of the lightest description, and freed as much as possible of every thing that was unnecessary to the safety of those it supported, the spars floated sufficiently buoyant for the temporary security of the fugitives.

"Cut the fast," said Ludlow, involuntarily starting at several explosions in the interior, which followed each other in quick succession, and which were succeeded by one which sent fragments of burning wood into the air. "Cut,

and bear the raft off the ship! God knows, we have need to be further asunder!"

"Cut not!" cried the half frantic Seadrift—"my brave—my devoted—"

"Is safe," calmly said the Skimmer, appearing in the rattlings of the main-rigging, which was still untouched by the fire. "Cut of all; I stay to brace the mizen-top-sail more firmly aback."

The duty was done, and for a moment the fine figure of the free-trader was seen standing on the edge of the burning ship, looking with regret at the glowing mass.

"'Tis the end of a lovely craft," he said, loud enough to be heard by those beneath. Then he appeared in the air and sunk into the sea. "The last signal was from the ward-room," added the dauntless and dexterous mariner, as he rose from the water, and shaking the brine from his head, he took his place on the stage. "Would to God the wind would blow, for we have need of greater distance!"

The precaution the free-trader had taken in adjusting the sails was not without its use.

Motion the raft had none; but as the top-sails of the Coquette were still aback, the flaming mass, no longer arrested by the clogs in the water, began slowly to separate from the floating spars, though the tottering and half-burnt masts threatened at each moment to fall.

Never did moments seem so long as those which succeeded. Even the Skimmer and Ludlow watched, in speechless interest, the tardy movements of the ship. By little and little she receded, and after ten minutes of intense expectation, the seamen, whose anxiety had increased as their exertions ended, began to breathe more freely. They were still fearfully near the dangerous fabric, but destruction from the explosion was no longer inevitable. The flames began to glide upwards, and then the heavens appeared on fire, as one heated sail after another kindled and flared wildly in the breeze.

Still the stern of the vessel was entire. The body of the master was seated against the mizen-mast, and even the stern visage of the old seaman was distinctly visible under the broad light of the conflagration. Ludlow gazed at it in

melancholy, and for a time he ceased to think of his ship; while memory dwelt in sadness on those scenes of boyish happiness, and of professional pleasures, in which his ancient shipmate had so largely participated. The roar of a gun, whose stream of fire flashed nearly to their faces, and the sullen whistling of its shot, which crossed the raft, failed to awaken him from his trance.

"Stand firm to the mess-chest," half whispered the Skimmer, motioning to his companions to place themselves in attitudes to support the weaker of their party, while with sedulous care he braced his own athletic person, in a manner to throw all of its weight and strength against the seat. "Stand firm, and be ready."

Ludlow complied, though his eye scarce changed its direction. He saw the bright flame that was rising above the arm-chest, and he fancied that it came from the funeral pile of the young Dumont, whose fate at that moment he was almost disposed to envy. Then his look returned to the grim countenance of Trysail. At moments it seemed as if the dead master

spoke, and so strong did the illusion become that our young sailor more than once bent forward to listen. While under this delusion the body rose, with the arms stretched upwards. The air was filled with a sheet of streaming fire, while the ocean and the heavens glowed with one glare of intense and fiery red. Notwithstanding the precaution of the Skimmer of the Seas, the chest was driven from its place, and those by whom it was held were nearly precipitated into the water. A deep, heavy detonation proceeded, as it were, from the bosom of the sea, which, while it wounded the ear less than the sharp explosion that had just before issued from the gun, was audible at the distant capes of the Delaware. The body of Trysail sailed upward for fifty fathoms in the centre of a flood of flame, and describing a short curve, it came towards the raft and cut the water within reach of the captain's arm. A sullen plunge of a gun followed, and proclaimed the tremendous power of the explosion, while a ponderous yard fell athwart a part of the raft, sweeping away the four petty officers of Ludlow, as if they had

been dust driving before a gale. To increase the wild and fearful grandeur of the dissolution of the royal cruiser, one of the cannon emitted its fiery contents while sailing in the void.

The burning spars, the falling fragments, the blazing and scattered canvass and cordage, the glowing shot, and all the torn particles of the ship, were seen descending. Then followed the gurgling of water, as the ocean swallowed all that remained of the cruiser which had so long been the pride of the American seas. The fiery glow disappeared, and a gloom like that which succeeds the glare of vivid lightning fell on the scene.

CHAPTER IX.

"Please you, read."

Cymbeline.

"It is past!" said the Skimmer of the Seas, raising himself from the attitude of great muscular exertion, which he had assumed in order to support the mess-chest, and walking out along the single mast, towards the spot whence the four seamen of Ludlow had just been swept. "It is past! and those who are called to the last account, have met their fates in such a scene as none but a seaman may witness, while those who are spared, have need of

all a seaman's skill and resolution for that which remains! Captain Ludlow, I do not despair, for see, the lady of the brigantine has still a smile for her servitors!"

Ludlow, who had followed the steady and daring free-trader to the place where the spar had fallen, turned and cast a look in the direction that the other stretched his arm. Within a hundred feet of him, he saw the image of the sea-green lady, rocking in the agitated water, and turned towards the raft with its usual expression of wild and malicious intelligence. This emblem of their fancied mistress, had been borne in front of the smugglers when they mounted the poop of the Coquette, and the steeled staff on which the lantern was perched, had been struck into a horse-bucket by the standard-bearer of the moment, ere he entered the mélée of the combat. During the conflagration this object had more than once met the eye of Ludlow, and now it appeared floating quietly by him, in a manner almost to shake even his contempt for the ordinary superstitions of seamen.

While he hesitated in what manner he should reply to his companion's remark, the latter plunged into the sea, and swam towards the light. He was soon by the side of the raft again, bearing aloft the symbol of his brigantine. There are none so firm in the dominion of reason, as to be entirely superior to the secret impulses which teach us all to believe in the hidden agency of a good or an evil fortune. The voice of the free-trader was more cheerful, and his step more sure and elastic, as he crossed the stage and struck the armed end of the staff into that part of the top-rim of the Coquette which floated uppermost.

"Courage!" he gaily cried. "While this light burns my star is not set! Courage, lady of the land, for here is one of the deep waters who still looks kindly on her followers! We are at sea on a frail craft it is certain, but a dull sailor may make a sure passage. — Speak, gallant Master Seadrift; thy gaiety and spirit should revive under so goodly an omen!"

But the agent of so many pleasant masquerades, and the instrument of so much of his artifice, had not a fortitude equal to the buoyant temper of the smuggler. The counterfeit bowed his head by the side of the silent Alida without reply. The Skimmer of the Seas regarded the group a moment with manly interest, and then touching the arm of Ludlow, he walked with a balancing step along the spars until they had reached a spot where they might confer without causing unnecessary alarm to their companions.

Although so imminent and so pressing a danger as that of the explosion had passed, the situation of those who had escaped was scarcely better than that of those who had been lost. The heavens shewed a few glimmering stars in the openings of the clouds; and now that the first contrast of the change had lessened, there was just enough light to render all the features of their actual state gloomily imposing.

It has been said that the foremast of the Coquette went by the board with most of its

hamper aloft. The sails, with such portion of the rigging as might help to sustain it, had been hastily cut away as related, and after its fall until the moment of the explosion, the common men had been engaged either in securing the staging, or in clearing the wreck of those heavy ropes which, useless as fastenings, only added to the weight of the mass. The whole wreck lay upon the sea, with the yards crossed and in their places, much as the spars had stood. The large booms had been unshipped and laid in such a manner around the top, with the ends resting on the lower and top-sail yards, as to form the foundation of the staging. The smaller booms with the mess-chest and shot-boxes were all that lay between the group in the centre and the depths of the ocean. The upper part of the top-rim rose a few feet above the water, and formed an important protection against the night-breeze and the constant washing of the waves. In this manner were the females seated, cautioned not to trust their feet on the frail security of the booms, and supported by the unremit-

ting care of the Alderman. François had submitted to be lashed to the top by one of the brigantine's seamen, while the latter, all of the common herd who remained, encouraged by the presence of their standard light, began to occupy themselves in looking to the fastenings and other securities of the raft.

"We are in no condition for a long or an active cruise, Captain Ludlow," said the Skimmer, when he and his companion were out of hearing. "I have been at sea in all weathers, and in every description of craft; but this is the boldest of my experiments on the water.—I hope it may not be the last!"

"We cannot conceal from ourselves the frightful hazards we run," returned Ludlow, "however much we may wish them to be a secret to some among us."

"This is truly a deserted sea to be abroad in on a raft! Were we in the narrow passages between the British islands and the Main, or even in the Biscay waters, there would be hope that some trader or roving cruiser might cross

our track; but our chance here lies much between the Frenchman and the brigantine."

"The enemy has doubtless seen and heard the explosion, and as the land is so near, they will infer that the people are saved in the boats. Our chance of seeing more of them is much diminished by the accident of the fire, since there will no longer be a motive for remaining on the coast."

"And will your young officers abandon their captain without a search?"

"Hope of aid from that quarter is faint. The ship ran miles while in flame, and before the light returns, these spars will have drifted leagues with the ebbing tide to seaward."

"Truly I have sailed with better auguries!" observed the Skimmer.—"What are the bearings and distance of the land?"

"It still lies to the north, but we are fast setting east and southerly. Ere morning we shall be abeam of Montauk, or even beyond it; we must already be some leagues in the offing."

"That is worse than I had imagined!—but there is hope on the flood?"

"The flood will bear us northward again—but—what think you of the heavens?"

"Unfavourable though not desperate. The sea-breeze will return with the sun."

"And with it will return the swell! How long will these ill-secured spars hold together, when agitated by the heave of the water? Or how long will those with us bear up against the wash of the sea, unsupported by nourishment?"

"You paint in gloomy colours, Captain Ludlow," said the free-trader, drawing a heavy breath in spite of all his resolution. "My experience tells me you are right, though my wishes would fain contradict you. Still I think we have the promise of a tranquil night."

"Tranquil for a ship, or even for a boat; but hazardous to a raft like this. You see that this top-mast already works in the cap at each heave of the water, and as the wood loosens, our security lessens."

"Thy council is not flattering!—Captain

Ludlow, you are a seaman and a man, and I shall not attempt to trifle with your knowledge. With you I think the danger imminent, and almost our only hope dependant on the good fortune of my brigantine."

"Will those in her think it their duty to quit their anchorage to come in quest of a raft whose existence is unknown to them?"

"There is hope in the vigilance of her of the sea-green mantle! You may deem this fanciful or even worse at such a moment; but I, who have run so many gauntlets under her favour, have faith in her fortunes. Surely you are not a seaman, Captain Ludlow, without a secret dependence on some unseen and potent agency?"

"My dependence is placed in the agency of Him who is all potent, but ever visible. If He forget us, we may indeed despair!"

"This is well, but it is not the fortune I would express. Believe me, spite of an education which teaches all you have said, and of a reason that is often too clear for folly, there is a secret reliance on hidden chances, that has

been created by a life of activity and hazard, and which, if it should do nothing better, does not abandon me to despair. The omen of the light and the smile of my mistress would cheer me spite of a thousand philosophers !"

" You are fortunate in purchasing consolation so cheaply," returned the commander of Queen Anne, who felt a latent hope in his companion's confidence he would have hesitated to acknowledge. " I see but little that we can do to aid our chances, except it be to clear away all unnecessary weight, and to secure the raft as much as possible by additional lashings."

The Skimmer of the Seas assented to the proposal. Consulting a moment longer on the details of their expedients, they rejoined the group near the top in order to see them executed. As the seamen on the raft were reduced to the two people of the brigantine, Ludlow and his companion were obliged to assist in the performance of the duty.

Much useless rigging, that added to the pressure without aiding the buoyancy of the raft, was cut away, and all the boom-irons were

knocked off the yards and suffered to descend to the bottom of the ocean. By these means a great weight was taken from the raft, which in consequence floated with so much additional power to sustain those who depended on it for life. The Skimmer, accompanied by his two silent but obedient seamen, ventured along the attenuated and submerged spars to the extremity of the tapering masts; and after toiling with the dexterity of men accustomed to deal with the complicated machinery of a ship in the darkest nights, they succeeded in releasing the two smaller masts, with their respective yards, and in floating them down to the body of the wreck, or the part around the top Here the sticks were crossed in a manner to give great additional strength and footing to the stage.

There was an air of hope, and a feeling of increased security in this employment. Even the Alderman and François aided in the task to the extent of their knowledge and force. But when these alterations were made, and additional lashings had been applied to keep the top-mast and the larger yards in their places,

Ludlow, by joining those who were around the mast-head, tacitly admitted that little more could be done to avert the chances of the elements.

During the few hours occupied in this important duty, Alida and her companion addressed themselves to God in long and fervent petitions. With woman's faith in that Divine Being who alone could avail them, and with woman's high mental fortitude in moments of protracted trial, they had both known how to control the exhibition of their terrors, and had sought their support in the same appeal to a power superior to all of earth. Ludlow was therefore more than rewarded by the sound of Alida's voice speaking to him cheerfully, as she thanked him for what he had done, when he admitted that he could now do no more.

"The rest is with Providence!" added Alida. "All that bold and skilful seamen can do have ye done; and all that woman in such a situation can do, have we done in your behalf!"

"Thou hast thought of me in thy prayers,

Alida! It is an intercession that the stoutest needs, and which none but the fool derides."

"And thou, Eudora—thou hast remembered Him who quiets the waters?" said a deep voice, near the bending form of the counterfeit Sea-drift.

"I have."

"'Tis well—There are points to which manhood and experience may pass, and there are those where all is left to One mightier than the elements!"

Words like these coming from the lips of one of the known character of the Skimmer of the Seas, were not given to the winds. Even Ludlow cast an uneasy look at the heavens when they came upon his ear, as if they conveyed a secret notice of the whole extremity of the danger by which they were environed. None answered, and a long silence succeeded, during which some of the more fatigued slumbered uneasily, spite of their fearful situation.

In this manner did the night pass in weari-

ness and anxiety. Little was said, and for hours scarce a limb was moved in the group that clustered around the mess-chest. As the signs of day appeared, however, every faculty was keenly awake to catch the first signs of what they had to hope, or the first certainty of what they had to fear.

The surface of the ocean was still smooth, though the long swells in which the element was heaving and setting, sufficiently indicated that the raft had floated far from the land. This fact was rendered sure when the light, which soon appeared along the eastern margin of the narrow view, was shed gradually over the whole horizon. Nothing was at first visible but one gloomy and vacant waste of water. But a cry of joy from Seadrift, whose senses had long been practised in ocean sights, soon drew all eyes in the direction opposite to that of the rising sun, and it was not long before all on the low raft had a view of the snowy surfaces of a ship's sails, as the glow of morning touched the canvass.

"It is the Frenchman," said the free-trader.

"He is charitably looking for the wreck of his late enemy!"

"It may be so, for our fate can be no secret to him," was the answer of Ludlow. "Unhappily, we had run some distance from the anchorage before the flames broke out. Truly those with whom we so lately struggled for life are bent on a duty of humanity."

"Ah, yonder is his crippled consort!—to leeward many a league. The gay bird has been too sadly stripped of its plumage to fly so near the wind! This is man's fortune! He uses his power at one moment to destroy the very means that become necessary to his safety the next."

"And what think you of our hopes?" asked Alida, searching in the countenance of Ludlow a clue to their fate. "Does the stranger move in a direction favourable to our wishes?"

Neither Ludlow nor the Skimmer replied. Both regarded the frigate intently, and then, as objects became more distinct, both answered by a common impulse that the ship was seen steering directly towards them. The declaration

excited general hope, and even the negress was no longer restrained by her situation from expressing her joy in vociferous exclamations of delight.

A few minutes of active and ready exertion succeeded. A light boom was unlashed from the raft, and raised on its end, supporting a little signal, made of the handkerchiefs of the party, which fluttered in the light breeze at the elevation of some twenty feet above the surface of the water. After this precaution was observed, they were obliged to await the result in such patience as they could assume. Minute passed after minute, and at each moment the form and proportions of the ship became more distinct, until all the mariners of the party declared they could distinguish men on her yards. A cannon would have readily sent its shot from the ship to the raft, and yet no sign betrayed the consciousness of those in the former of the proximity of the latter.

"I do not like his manner of steering!" observed the Skimmer to the silent and attentive Ludlow. "He yaws broadly, as if disposed to

give up the search. God grant him the heart to continue on his course ten minutes longer !"

" Have we no means of making ourselves heard ?" demanded the Alderman. " Methinks the voice of a strong man might be sent thus far across the water, when life is the stake."

The more experienced shook their heads, but not discouraged, the burgher raised his voice. with a power that was sustained by the imminency of the peril. He was joined by the seamen, and even Ludlow lent his aid, until all were hoarse with the fruitless efforts. Men were evidently aloft, and in some numbers, searching the ocean with their eyes, but still no answering signal came from the vessel.

The ship continued to approach, and the raft was less than half a mile from her bows, when the vast fabric suddenly receded from the breeze, shewed the whole of its glittering broadside, and swinging its yards, betrayed by its new position that the search in that direction was abandoned. The instant Ludlow saw the falling-off of the frigate's bows, he cried—

"Now raise your voices together; this is the final chance!"

They united in a common shout, with the exception of the Skimmer of the Seas. The latter leaned against the top, with folded arms, listening to their impotent efforts with a melancholy smile.

"It is well attempted," said the calm and extraordinary seaman, when the clamour had ceased, advancing along the raft, and motioning for all to be silent; "but it has failed. The swinging of the yards, and the orders given in waring ship, would prevent a stronger sound from being audible to men so actively employed. I flatter none with hope, but this is truly the moment for a final effort."

He placed his hands to his mouth, and disregarding words, he raised a cry so clear, so powerful, and yet so full, that it seemed impossible those in the vessel should not hear. Thrice did he repeat the experiment, though it was evident that each successive exertion was feebler than the last.

"They hear!" cried Alida. "There is a movement in the sails!"

"'Tis the breeze freshening," answered Ludlow, in sadness, at her side. "Each moment takes them away!"

The melancholy truth was too apparent for denial, and for half an hour the retiring ship was watched in the bitterness of disappointment. At the end of that time, she fired a gun, spread additional canvass on her wide booms, and stood away before the wind, to join her consort, whose upper sails were already dipping to the surface of the sea, in the southern board. With this change in her movements, vanished all expectation of succour from the cruiser of the enemy.

Perhaps in every situation of life it is necessary that hope should be first lessened by disappointment, before the buoyancy of the human mind will permit it to descend to the level of an evil fortune. Until a frustrated effort teaches him the difficulty of the attempt, he who has fallen may hope to rise again, and

it is only when an exertion has been made with lessened means, that we learn the value of advantages which have perhaps been long enjoyed with a very undue estimate of their importance. Until the stern of the French frigate was seen, retiring from the raft, those who were on it had not been fully sensible of the extreme danger of their situation. Hope had been strongly excited by the return of dawn, for while the shadows of night lay on the ocean, their situation resembled that of one who strove to pierce the obscurity of the future, in order to obtain a presage of better fortunes. With the light had come the distant sail. As the day advanced, the ship had approached, relinquished her search, and disappeared, without a prospect of her return.

The stoutest heart among the group on the raft began to sink at the gloomy fate which now seemed inevitable.

"Here is an evil omen!" whispered Ludlow, directing his companion's eyes to the dark and pointed fins of three or four sharks, that were gliding above the surface of the water, and in

so fearful a proximity to their persons, as to render their situation on the low spars, over which the water was washing and retiring at each rise and fall of the waves, doubly dangerous. "The creatures' instinct speaks ill for our hopes!"

"There is a belief among seamen that these animals feel a secret impulse which directs them to their prey," returned the Skimmer; "but fortune may yet balk them.—Rogerson!" calling to one of his followers—"Thy pockets are rarely wanting in a fisherman's tackle: hast thou haply line and hook for these hungry miscreants? The question is getting narrowed to one in which the simplest philosophy is the wisest. When eat, or to be eaten, is the mooted point, most men will decide for the former."

A hook of sufficient size was soon produced, and a line was quickly provided from some of the small cordage that still remained about the masts. A piece of leather, torn from a spar, answered for the bait, and the lure was thrown. Extreme hunger seemed to engross the vora-

cious animals, who darted at the imaginary prey with the rapidity of lightning. The shock was so sudden and violent, that the hapless mariner was drawn from his slippery and precarious footing into the sea. The whole passed with a frightful and alarming rapidity. A common cry of horror was heard, and the last despairing glance of the fallen man was witnessed. The mutilated body floated for an instant in its blood, with the look of agony and terror still imprinted on the conscious countenance. At the next moment it had become food for the monsters of the sea.

All had passed away but the deep dye on the surface of the ocean. The gorged fish disappeared, but the dark spot remained near the immovable raft, as if placed there to warn the survivors of their fate.

"This is horrible!" said Ludlow.

"A sail!" shouted the Skimmer, whose voice and tone, breaking in on that moment of intense horror and apprehension, sounded like a cry from the heavens. "My gallant brigantine!"

"God grant she come with better fortune than those who have so lately left us!"

"God grant it, truly! If this hope fail, there is none left. Few pass here, and we have had sufficient proof that our top-gallants are not so lofty as to catch every eye."

All attention was now bestowed on the white speck which was visible on the margin of the ocean, and which the Skimmer of the Seas confidently pronounced to be the Water Witch. None but a seaman could have felt this certainty, for, seen from the low raft, there was little else to be distinguished but the heads of the upper sails. The direction too was unfavourable, as it was to leeward; but both Ludlow and the free-trader assured their companions that the vessel was endeavouring to beat in with the land.

The two hours that succeeded lingered like days of misery. So much depended on a variety of events, that every circumstance was noted by the seamen of the party with an interest bordering on agony. A failure of the wind might compel the vessel to remain sta-

tionary; and then both brigantine and raft would be at the mercy of the uncertain currents of the ocean; a change of wind might cause a change of course, and render a meeting impossible; an increase of the breeze might cause destruction, even before the succour could come. In addition to these obvious hazards, there were all the chances which were dependent on the fact that the people of the brigantine had every reason to believe the fate of the party was already sealed.

Still fortune seemed propitious, for the breeze, though steady, was light, the intention of the vessel evidently to pass somewhere near them, and the hope that their object was search, so strong and plausible as to exhilarate every bosom.

At the expiration of the time named, the brigantine passed the raft to leeward, and so near as to render the smaller objects in her rigging distinctly visible.

"The faithful fellows are looking for us!" exclaimed the free-trader, with strong emotion

in his voice. "They are men to scour the coast ere they abandon us!"

"They pass us—wave the signal—it may catch their eyes!"

The little flag was unheeded, and, after so long and so intense expectation, the party on the raft had the pain to see the swift-moving vessel glide past them, and drawing so far ahead as to leave little hope of her return. The heart of even the Skimmer of the Seas appeared to sink within him at the disappointment.

"For myself I care not," said the stout mariner, mournfully. "Of what consequence is it in what sea or on what voyage a seaman goes into his watery tomb! but for thee, my hapless and playful Eudora, I could wish another fate. Ha!—she tacks! the sea-green lady has an instinct for her children, after all!"

The brigantine was in stays.—In ten or fifteen minutes more, the vessel was again abeam of the raft, and to windward.

"If she pass us now, our chance is gone, without a shadow of hope," said the Skimmer,

motioning solemnly for silence. Then applying his hands to his mouth, he shouted as if despair lent a giant's volume to his lungs.

"Ho! the Water Witch—ahoy!"

The last word issued from his lips with the clear, audible cry, that the peculiar sound is intended to produce. It appeared as if the conscious little bark knew its commander's voice, for its course changed slightly, as if the fabric were possessed of the consciousness and faculties of life.

"Ho! the Water Witch—ahoy!" shouted the Skimmer, with a still mightier effort.

"Hilloa!" came down faintly on the breeze, and the direction of the brigantine again altered.

"The Water Witch!—the Water Witch!—ahoy!" broke out of the lips of the mariner of the shawl with a supernatural force, the last cry being drawn out, till he who uttered it sunk back, exhausted with the effort.

The words were still ringing in the ears of the breathless party on the raft, when a heavy shout swept across the water. At the next moment the boom of the brigantine swung off, and her

narrow bows were seen pointing towards the little beacon of white that played ab[illegible] sea. It was but a moment, but it was [illegible]ment pregnant with a thousand hopes and fears, before the beautiful craft was gliding within fifty feet of the top. In less than five minutes the spars of the Coquette were floating on the wide ocean, unpeopled and abandoned.

The first sensation of the Skimmer of the Seas, when his foot touched the deck of his brigantine, might have been one of deep and intense gratitude. He was silent, and seemingly oppressed at the throat. Stepping along the planks he cast an eye aloft, and struck his hand powerfully on the capstan, in a manner that was divided between convulsion and affection. Then he smiled grimly on his attentive and obedient crew, speaking with all his wonted cheerfulness and authority.

"Fill away the top-sail—brace up and haul aft! Trim every thing flat as boards, boys; jam the hussy in with the coast."

CHAPTER X.

"Beseech you, Sir, were you present at this relation?"
Winter's Tale.

On the following morning the windows of the Lust in Rust denoted the presence of its owner. There was an air of melancholy, and yet of happiness, in the faces of many who were seen about the buildings and the grounds, as if a great good had been accompanied by some grave and qualifying circumstances of sorrow. The negroes wore an air of that love of the extraordinary, which is the concomitant of ignorance; while those of the more fortunate class resem-

bled men who retained a recollection of serious evils that were past.

In the private apartment of the burgher, however, an interview took place, which was characterized by an air of deep concern. The parties were only the free-trader and the Alderman. But it was apparent in the look of each, that they met like men who had interesting and serious matters to discuss. Still, one accustomed to the expressions of the human countenance, might have seen that while the former was about to introduce topics in which his feelings were powerfully enlisted, the other looked only to the grosser interests of his commerce.

"My minutes are counted," said the mariner, stepping into the centre of the room and facing his companion; "that which is to be said must be said briefly. The inlet can only be passed on the rising water, and it will ill consult your opinions of prudence were I to tarry till the hue and cry that will follow the intelligence of that which has lately happened in the offing, shall be heard in the province."

"Spoken with a rover's discretion. This re-

serve will perpetuate friendship, which is nought weakened by your activity in our late uncomfortable voyage on the yards and masts of Queen Anne's late cruiser. Well, I wish no ill luck to any loyal gentleman in her Majesty's service, but it is a thousand pities that thou wert not ready, now the coast is clear, with a good heavy inward cargo. The last was altogether an affair of secret drawers and rich laces, valuable in itself and profitable in the exchange; but the colony is sadly in want of certain articles that can only be landed at leisure."

"I come on other matters. There have been transactions between us, Alderman Van Beverout, that you little understand."

"You speak of a small mistake in the last invoice?—'Tis all explained, Master Skimmer, on a second examination, and thy accuracy is as well established as that of the Bank of England."

"Established or not, let him who doubts cease to deal. I have no other motto than 'confidence,' nor any other rule but 'justice.'"

"You overrun my meaning, friend of mine

I intimate no suspicions; but accuracy is the soul of commerce, as profit is its object. Clear accounts, with reasonable balances, are the surest cements of business intimacies. A little frankness operates in a secret trade, like equity in the courts, which re-establishes the justice that the law has destroyed. What is thy purpose?"

"It is now many years, Alderman Van Beverout, since this secret trade was commenced between you and my predecessor; he whom you have thought my father, but who only claimed that reverend appellation, by protecting the helplessness and infancy of the orphan child of a friend."

"The latter circumstance is new to me," returned the burgher, slowly bowing his head. "It may explain certain levities which have not been without their embarrassment. 'Tis five-and-twenty years, come August, Master Skimmer, and twelve of them have been under thy auspices. I will not say that the adventures might not have been better managed; as it is, they are tolerable. I am getting old, and

think of closing the risks and hazards of life; two or three, or at the most, four or five lucky voyages must, I think, bring a final settlement between us."

"'Twill be made sooner. I believe the history of my predecessor was no secret to you. The manner in which he was driven from the marine of the Stuarts, on account of his opposition to tyranny, his refuge with an only daughter in the colonies, and his final recourse to the free-trade for a livelihood, have often been alluded to between us."

"Hum—I have a good memory for business, Master Skimmer, but I am as forgetful as a new-made lord of his pedigree on all matters that should be overlooked. I dare say, however, it was as you have stated."

"You know that when my protector and predecessor abandoned the land, he took his all with him upon the water?"

"He took a wholesome and good-going schooner, Master Skimmer, with an assorted freight of chosen tobacco, well ballasted with stones from off the sea-shore. He was no foolish

admirer of sea-green women and flaunting brigantines. Often did the royal cruisers mistake the worthy dealer for an industrious fisherman."

"He had his humours, and I have mine. But you forget a part of the freight he carried; a part that was not the least valuable?"

"There might have been a bale of marten's furs, for the trade was just getting brisk in that article."

"There was a beautiful, an innocent, and an affectionate girl!"

The Alderman made an involuntary movement, which nearly hid his countenance from his companion.

"There was, indeed, a beautiful, and as you say, a most warm-hearted girl, in the concern!" he uttered, in a voice that was subdued and hoarse. "She died, as I have heard from thyself, Master Skimmer, in the Italian seas. I never saw the father after the last visit of his child to this coast."

"She did die among the islands of the Mediterranean. But the void she left in the hearts

of all who knew her, was filled in time by her daughter."

The Alderman started from his chair, and looking the free-trader intently and anxiously in the face, he slowly repeated the word—

"Daughter!"

"I have said it. Eudora is the daughter of that injured woman—need I say who is the father?"

The burgher groaned, and covering his face with his hands, he sunk back into his chair, shivering convulsively.

"What evidence have I of this?" he at length muttered. "Eudora is thy sister?"

The answer of the free-trader was accompanied by a melancholy smile.

"You have been deceived. Save the brigantine, my being is attached to nothing. When my own brave father fell by the side of him who protected my youth, none of my blood were left. I loved him as a father, and he called me son; while Eudora was passed upon you as the child of a second marriage. But here is sufficient evidence of her birth."

The Alderman took a paper which his companion put gravely into his hand, and his eyes ran eagerly over its contents. It was a letter to himself from the mother of Eudora, written after the birth of the latter, and with the endearing affection of a woman. The love between the young merchant and the fair daughter of his secret correspondent, had been less criminal on his part than most similar connections. Nothing but the peculiarity of their situation, and the real embarrassment of introducing to the world one whose existence was unknown to his friends, and their mutual awe of the unfortunate but still proud parent, had prevented a legal marriage. The simple forms of the colony were easily satisfied, and there was even some reason to raise a question whether they had not been sufficiently consulted to render the offspring legitimate. As Myndert Van Beverout therefore read the epistle of her whom he had once so truly loved, and whose loss had, in more senses than one, been to him an irreparable misfortune, since his character might have yielded to her gentle and healthful influence, his limbs

trembled, and his whole frame betrayed the violence of extreme agitation. The language of the dying woman was kind, and free from reproach, but it was solemn and admonitory. She communicated the birth of their child; but she left it to the disposition of her own father, while she apprised the author of its being of its existence; and in the event of its ever being consigned to his care, she earnestly recommended it to his love. The close was a leave-taking, in which the lingering affections of this life were placed in mournful contrast to the hopes of the future.

"Why has this so long been hidden from me?" demanded the agitated merchant—"Why, oh! reckless and fearless man! have I been permitted to expose the frailties of nature to my own child?"

The smile of the free-trader was bitter and proud.

"Mr. Van Beverout, we are no dealers of the short voyage. Our trade is the concern of life; our world the Water Witch. As we have so little of the interests of the land, our, phi-

losophy is above its weaknesses. The birth of Eudora was concealed from you at the will of her grandfather. It might have been resentment;—it might have been pride. Had it been affection, the girl has that to justify the fraud."

"And Eudora herself!—Does she, or has she long known the truth?"

"But lately. Since the death of our common friend, the girl has been solely dependent on me for council and protection. It is now a year since she first learned she was not my sister. Until then, like you, she supposed us equally derived from one who was the parent of neither. Necessity has compelled me of late to keep her much in the brigantine."

"The retribution is righteous!" groaned the Alderman. "I am punished for my pusillanimity in the degradation of my own child!"

The step of the free-trader, as he advanced nearer to his companion, was full of dignity, and his keen eye glowed with the resentment of an offended man

"Alderman Van Beverout," he said, with stern rebuke in his voice, "you receive your

daughter stainless as was her unfortunate mother, when necessity compelled him whose being was wrapped up in her's to trust her beneath your roof. We of the contraband have our own opinions of right and wrong, and my gratitude, no less than my principles, teaches me that the descendant of my benefactor is to be protected, not injured. Had I in truth been the brother of Eudora, language and conduct more innocent could not have been shewn her than that she has both heard and witnessed while guarded by my care."

"From my soul, I thank thee!" burst from the lips of the Alderman. "The girl shall be acknowledged, and with such a dowry as I can give, she may yet hope for a suitable and honourable marriage."

"Thou mayest bestow her on thy favourite Patroon," returned the Skimmer, with a calm but sad eye. "She is more than worthy of all he can return. The man is willing to take her, for he is not ignorant of her sex and history. That much I thought due to Eudora herself,

when fortune placed the young man in my power."

"Thou art only too honest for this wicked world, Master Skimmer! Let me see the loving pair, and bestow my blessing on the instant!"

The free-trader turned slowly away, and opening a door, he motioned for those within to enter. Alida instantly appeared, leading the counterfeit Seadrift, clad in the proper attire of her sex. Although the burgher had often seen the supposed sister of the Skimmer in her female habiliments, she never before had struck him as a being of so rare beauty as at that moment. The silken whiskers had been removed, and in their places were burning cheeks that were rather enriched than discoloured by the warm touches of the sun. The dark, glossy ringlets, that were no longer artfully converted to the purposes of the masquerade, fell naturally in curls about the temples and brows, shading a countenance which, in general, was playfully arch, though at that moment it was shadowed

by reflection and feeling. It is seldom that two such beings are seen together, as those who now knelt at the feet of the merchant. In the breast of the latter, the accustomed and lasting love of the uncle and protector, appeared for an instant to struggle with the new-born affection of a parent. Nature was too strong for even his blunted and perverted sentiments, and calling his child aloud by name, the selfish and calculating Alderman sunk upon the neck of Eudora and wept. It would have been difficult to trace the emotions of the stern but observant free-trader, as he watched the progress of this scene. Distrust, uneasiness, and finally melancholy, was in his eye. With the latter expression predominant, he quitted the room like one who felt a stranger had no right to witness emotions so sacred.

Two hours later and the principal personages of the narrative were assembled on the margin of the cove, beneath the shade of an oak that seemed coeval with the continent. The brigantine was a-weigh, and under a light shew of canvass, she was making easy stretches in the

little basin, resembling, by the ease and grace of her movements, some beautiful swan sailing up and down in the enjoyment of its instinct. A boat had just touched the shore, and the Skimmer of the Seas stood near, stretching out a hand to aid the boy Zephyr to land.

"We subjects of the elements are slaves to superstition," he said, when the light foot of the child touched the ground. "It is the consequence of lives which ceaselessly present dangers superior to our powers. For many years have I believed that some great good, or some greater evil, would accompany the first visit of this boy to the land. For the first time his foot now stands on solid earth. I await the fulfilment of the augury!"

"It will be happy," returned Ludlow. "Alida and Eudora will instruct him in the opinions of this simple and fortunate country, and he seemeth one likely to do early credit to his schooling."

"I fear the boy will regret the lessons of the sea-green lady! Captain Ludlow, there is yet a duty to perform, which, as a man of more

feeling than you may be disposed to acknowledge, I cannot neglect. I have understood that you are accepted by la Belle Barbérie ?"

" Such is my happiness."

" Sir, in dispensing with explanation of the past, you have shewn a noble confidence that merits a return. When I came upon this coast, it was with a determination of establishing the claims of Eudora to the protection and fortune of her father. If I distrusted the influence and hostility of one so placed and so gifted to persuade as this lady, you will remember it was before acquaintance had enabled me to estimate more than her beauty. She was seized in her pavilion by my agency, and transported as a captive to the brigantine."

" I had believed her acquainted with the history of her cousin, and willing to aid in some fantasy which was to lead to the present happy restoration of the latter to her natural friends."

" You did her disinterestedness no more than justice. As some atonement for the personal wrong, and as the speediest and surest means of appeasing her alarm, I made my captive

acquainted with the facts; Eudora then heard, also for the first time, the history of her origin. The evidence was irresistible, and we found a generous and devoted friend where we had expected a rival."

"I knew that Alida could not prove less generous!" cried the admiring Ludlow, raising the hand of the blushing girl to his lips. "The loss of fortune is a gain, by shewing her true character."

"Hist, hist!" interrupted the Alderman; "there is little need to proclaim a loss of any kind. What must be done in the way of natural justice will doubtless be submitted to; but why let all in the colony know how much or how little is given with a bride?"

"The loss of fortune will be amply met!" returned the free-trader. "These bags contain gold. The dowry of my charge is ready at a moment's warning, whenever she shall make known her choice."

"Success and prudence!" exclaimed the burgher. "There is no less than a most commendable forethought in thy provision, Master

Skimmer, and whatever may be the opinion of the exchequer judges of thy punctuality and credit, it is mine that there are less responsible men about the Bank of England itself! This money is, no doubt, that which the girl can lawfully claim in right of her late grandfather?"

"It is."

"I take this to be a favourable moment to speak plainly on a subject which is very near my heart, and which may as well be broached under such favourable auspices as under any other. I understand, Mr. Van Staats, that on a further examination of your sentiments towards an old friend, you are of opinion that a closer alliance than the one we had contemplated, will most conduce to your happiness?"

"I will acknowledge that the coldness of la Belle Barbérie has damped my own warmth," returned the Patroon of Kinderhook, who rarely delivered himself of more at a time than the occasion required.

"And furthermore, I have been told, Sir, that an intimacy of a fortnight has given you reason to fix your affections on my daughter, whose

beauty is hereditary, and whose fortune is not likely to be diminished by this act of justice on the part of that upright and gallant mariner."

"To be received into the favour of your family, Mr. Van Beverout, would leave me little to desire in this life."

"And as for the other world, I never heard of a Patroon of Kinderhook who did not leave us with comfortable hopes for the future; as in reason they should, since few families in the colony have done more for the support of religion than they. They gave largely to the two Dutch churches in Manhattan; have actually built, with their own means, three very pretty brick edifices on the Manor, each having its Flemish steeple and suitable weathercocks, besides having done something handsome towards the venerable structure in Albany. Eudora, my child, this gentleman is a particular friend, and as such I can presume to recommend him to thy favour. You are not absolutely strangers, but in order that you may have every occasion to decide impartially, you will remain here together for a month longer, which will enable you to

choose without distraction and confusion. More than this for the present it is unnecessary to say, for it is my practice to leave all matters of this magnitude entirely to Providence."

The daughter, on whose speaking face the colour went and came like lights changing in an Italian sky, continued silent.

"You have happily put aside the curtain which concealed a mystery that no longer gave me uneasiness," interrupted Ludlow, addressing the free-trader; "can you do more, and say whence came this letter?"

The dark eye of Eudora instantly lighted. She looked at the Skimmer of the Seas, and laughed.

"'Twas another of those womanly artifices which have been practised in my brigantine. It was thought that a young commander of a royal cruiser would be less apt to watch our movements were his mind bent on the discovery of such a correspondent."

"And the trick has been practised before?"

"I confess it. But I can linger no longer. In a few minutes the tide will turn, and the

inlet become impassable. Eudora, we must decide on the fortunes of this child. Shall he to the ocean again?—or shall he remain to vary his life with a landsman's chances?"

"Who and what is the boy?" gravely demanded the Alderman.

"One dear to both," rejoined the free-trader. "His father was my nearest friend, and his mother long watched over the youth of Eudora. Until this moment he has been our mutual care;—he must now choose between us."

"He will not quit me?" hastily interrupted the alarmed Eudora—"Thou art my adopted son, and none can guide thy young mind like me. Thou hast need of woman's tenderness, Zephyr, and wilt not quit me?"

"Let the child be the arbiter of his own fate. I am credulous on the point of fortune, which is at least a happy belief for the contraband."

"Then let him speak. Wilt remain here amid these smiling fields, to ramble among yonder gay and sweetly-scented flowers, or wilt thou back to the water, where all is vacant and without change?"

The boy looked wistfully into her anxious eye, and then he bent his own hesitating glance on the calm features of the free-trader.

"We can put to sea," he said, "and when we make the homeward passage again, there will be many curious things for thee, Eudora!"

"But this may be the last opportunity to know the land of thy ancestors. Remember how terrible is the ocean in its anger, and how often the brigantine has been in danger of shipwreck!"

"Nay, that is womanish!—I have been on the royal yard in the squalls, and it never seemed to me that there was danger."

"Thou hast the unconsciousness and reliance of a ship-boy! But those who are older know that the life of a sailor is one of constant and imminent hazard.—Thou hast been among the islands in the hurricane, and hast seen the power of the elements?"

"I was in the hurricane, and so was the brigantine; and there you see how taunt and neat she is aloft, as if nothing had happened!"

"And you saw us yesterday floating on the

open sea, while a few ill-fastened spars kept us from going into its depths!"

"The spars floated, and you were not drowned, else I should have wept bitterly, Eudora."

"But thou wilt go deeper into the country, and see more of its beauties, its rivers and its mountains, its caverns and its woods. Here all is change, while the water is ever the same."

"Surely, Eudora, you forget strangely! Here it is all America. This mountain is America; yonder land, across the bay, is America, and the anchorage of yesterday was America. When we shall run off the coast, the next landfall will be England, or Holland, or Africa; and with a good wind, we may run down the shores of two or three countries in a day."

"And on them, too, thoughtless boy! If you lose this occasion, thy life will be wedded to hazard!"

"Farewell, Eudora," said the urchin, raising his mouth to give and receive the parting kiss.

"Eudora, adieu!" added a deep and melancholy voice at her elbow. "I can delay no longer, for my people shew symptoms of impa-

tience. Should this be the last of my voyages to the coast, thou wilt not forget those with whom thou hast so long shared good and evil!"

"Not yet—not yet—you will not quit us yet! Leave me the boy—leave me some other memorial of the past besides this pain!"

"My hour has come. The wind is freshening, and I trifle with its favour. 'Twill be better for thy happiness that none know the history of the brigantine, and a few hours will draw a hundred curious eyes from the town upon us."

"What care I for their opinions!—thou wilt not, cannot leave me yet!"

"Gladly would I stay, Eudora, but a seaman's home is his ship. Too much precious time is already wasted. Once more, adieu!"

The dark eye of the girl glanced wildly about her. It seemed as if in that one quick and hurried look it drank in all that belonged to the land and its enjoyments.

"Whither go you?" she asked, scarce suffering her voice to rise above a whisper.

"Whither do you sail, and when do you return?"

"I follow fortune. My return may be distant—never! Adieu then, Eudora—be happy with the friends that Providence hath given thee!"

The wandering eyes of the girl of the sea became still more unsettled. She grasped the offered hand of the free-trader in both her own, and wrung it in an impassioned and unconscious manner. Then releasing her hold, she opened wide her arms, and cast them convulsively about his unmoved and unyielding form.

"We will go together!—I am thine, and thine only!"

"Thou knowest not what thou sayest, Eudora!" gasped the Skimmer.—"Thou hast a father—friend—husband—"

"Away, away!" cried the frantic girl, waving her hand wildly towards Alida and the Patroon, who advanced as if hurrying to rescue her from a precipice — "Thine and thine only!"

The smuggler released himself from her frenzied grasp, and with the strength of a giant he held the struggling girl at the length of his arm, while he endeavoured to control the tempest of passion that struggled within him.

"Think, for one moment, think!" he said. "Thou wouldst follow an outcast—an outlaw—one hunted and condemned of men!"

"Thine, and thine only!"

"With a ship for a dwelling—the tempestuous ocean for a world!"

"Thy world is my world—thy home my home—thy danger mine!"

The shout which burst out of the chest of the Skimmer of the Seas was one of uncontrollable exultation.

"Thou art mine!" he cried. "Before a tie like this, the claim of such a father is forgotten! Burgher, adieu—I will deal by thy daughter more honestly than thou didst deal by my benefactor's child!"

Eudora was lifted from the ground as if her weight had been that of a feather, and spite of a sudden and impetuous movement of Ludlow and the Patroon, she was borne to the boat. In a moment the bark was afloat, with the gallant boy tossing his sea-cap upward in triumph. The brigantine, as if conscious of what had passed, wore round like a whirling chariot, and ere the spectators had recovered from their confusion and wonder, the boat was hanging at the tackles. The free-trader was seen on the poop, with an arm cast about the form of Eudora, waving a hand to the motionless group on the shore, while the still half-unconscious girl of the ocean signed her faint adieus to Alida and her father. The vessel glided through the inlet, and was immediately rocking on the billows of the surf. Then taking the full weight of the southern breeze, the fine and attenuated spars bent to its force, and the progress of the swift-moving craft was apparent by the bubbling line of its wake.

The day had begun to decline before Alida

and Ludlow quitted the lawn of the Lust in Rust. For the first hour the dark hull of the brigantine was seen supporting the moving cloud of canvass. Then the low structure vanished, and sail after sail settled into the water, until nothing was visible but a speck of glittering white. It lingered for a minute, and was swallowed in the void.

The nuptials of Ludlow and Alida were touched with a shade of melancholy. Natural affection in one, and professional sympathy in the other, had given them a deep and lasting interest in the fate of the adventurers.

Years passed away, and months were spent at the villa, in which a thousand anxious looks were cast upon the ocean. Each morning during the early months of summer, did Alida hasten to the windows of her pavilion in the hope of seeing the vessel of the contraband anchored in the cove. But always without success. It never returned; and though the rebuked and disappointed Alderman caused many secret inquiries to be made along the whole ex-

tent of the American coast, he never again heard of the renowned Skimmer of the Seas, or of his matchless Water Witch.

THE END.

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